AMAR CHITRA KATHA

RAMAN OF TENALI

THE BIRBAL OF THE SOUTH

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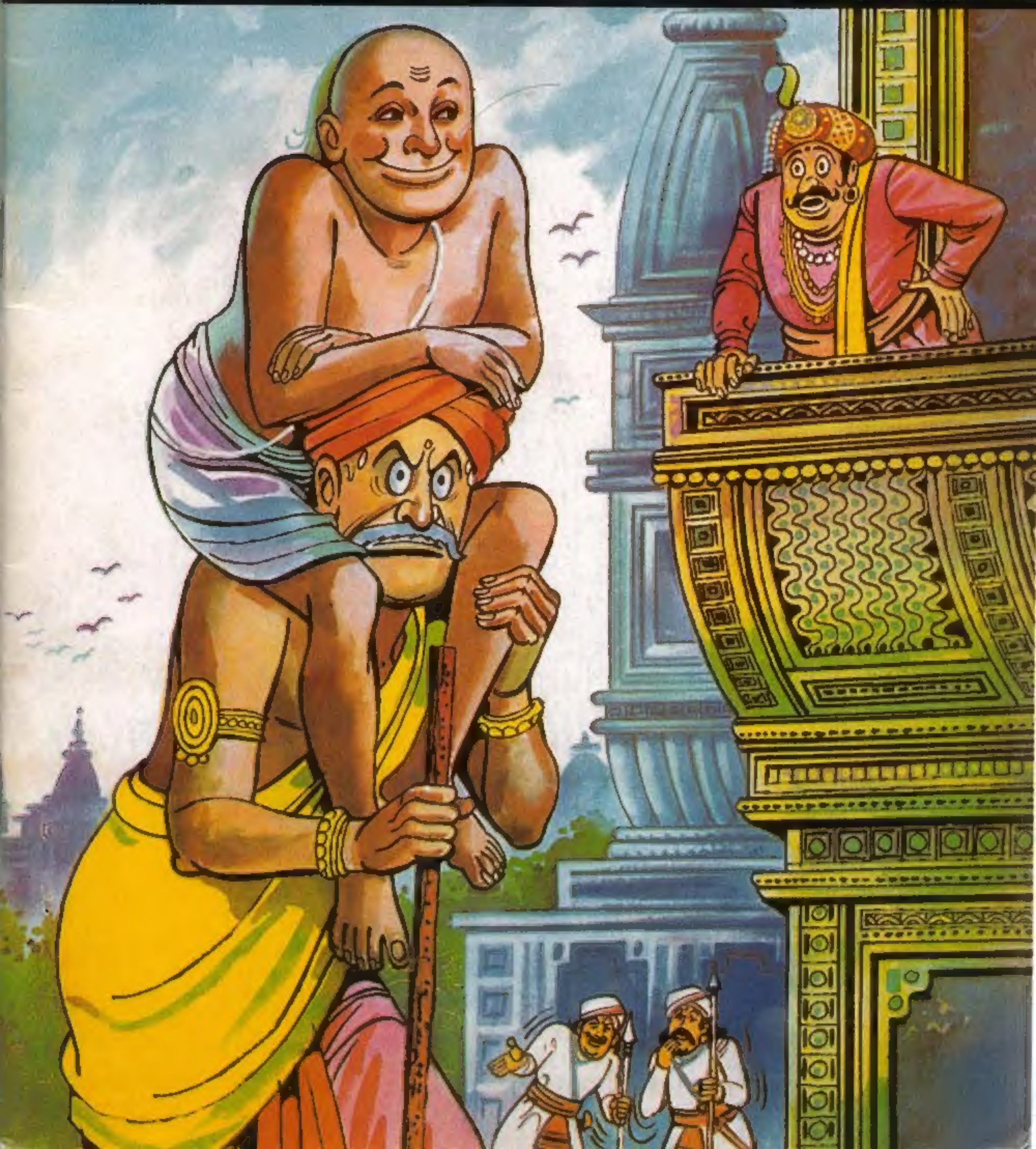


RAMAN OF TENALI

LONG LONG AGO, WHEN KRISHNA DEVA RAYA RULED OVER VIJAYA-NAGARA, THERE LIVED IN THE VILLAGE OF TENALI A POOR LAD CALLED RAMALINGAM. HIS FATHER WAS DEAD AND YET HE DID LITTLE FOR HIS MOTHER.

ONE DAY, HE WAS IDLING AS USUAL UNDER A TREE WHEN —

HEY, YOUNG MAN! AREN'T YOU ASHAMED OF YOURSELF? WASTING YOUR TIME HERE WHILE ALL THE OTHERS ARE BUSY IN THE FIELDS? WHY AREN'T YOU AT WORK TOO?

I'D LOVE TO WORK, SIR, BUT I CAN'T. MY HEALTH IS POOR.

IT WAS A LIE BUT THE SADHU BELIEVED HIM. HE FELT SORRY FOR THE YOUTH.

IF THAT IS SO, I'LL TEACH YOU A MANTRA* TO INVOKE THE GODDESS MAHAKALI. WHEN SHE APPEARS, ASK HER TO BLESS YOU WITH GOOD HEALTH.

I'LL LEARN THE MANTRA ALL RIGHT — BUT IT'S PLENTY OF FOOD I'LL ASK FOR. THAT IS THE BLESSING I NEED.

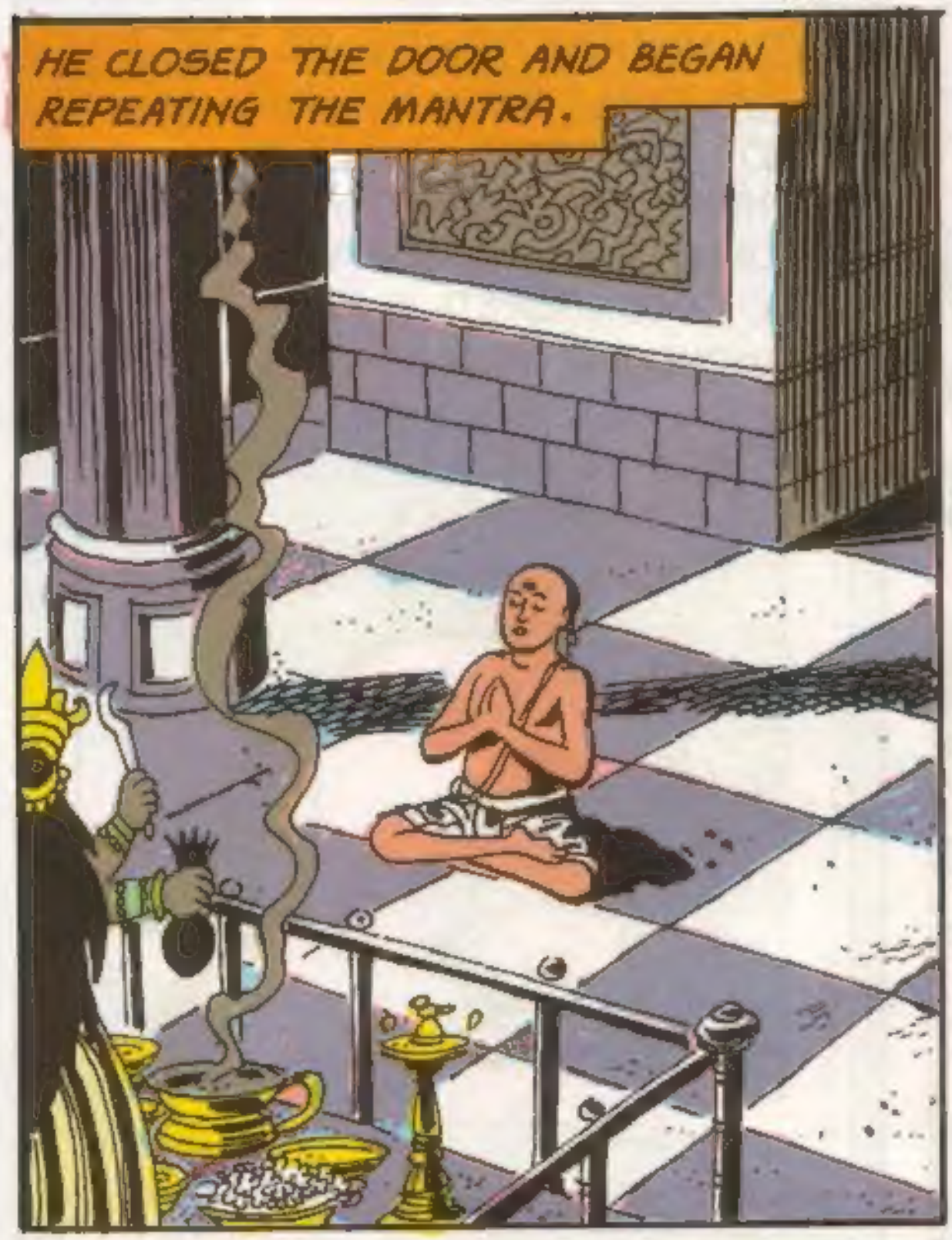
BEING CLEVER, RAMALINGAM OR RAMAN AS HE WAS KNOWN, SOON LEARNT THE MANTRA.

GOOD! NOW GO TO THE TEMPLE TONIGHT. SIT BEFORE THE IDOL AND REPEAT THE MANTRA A HUNDRED THOUSAND TIMES. THE GODDESS WILL THEN APPEAR.

AS YOU SAY, SIR.

THAT NIGHT, MUTTERING THE MANTRA TO HIMSELF, RAMAN RAN TO THE TEMPLE.

* CHANT

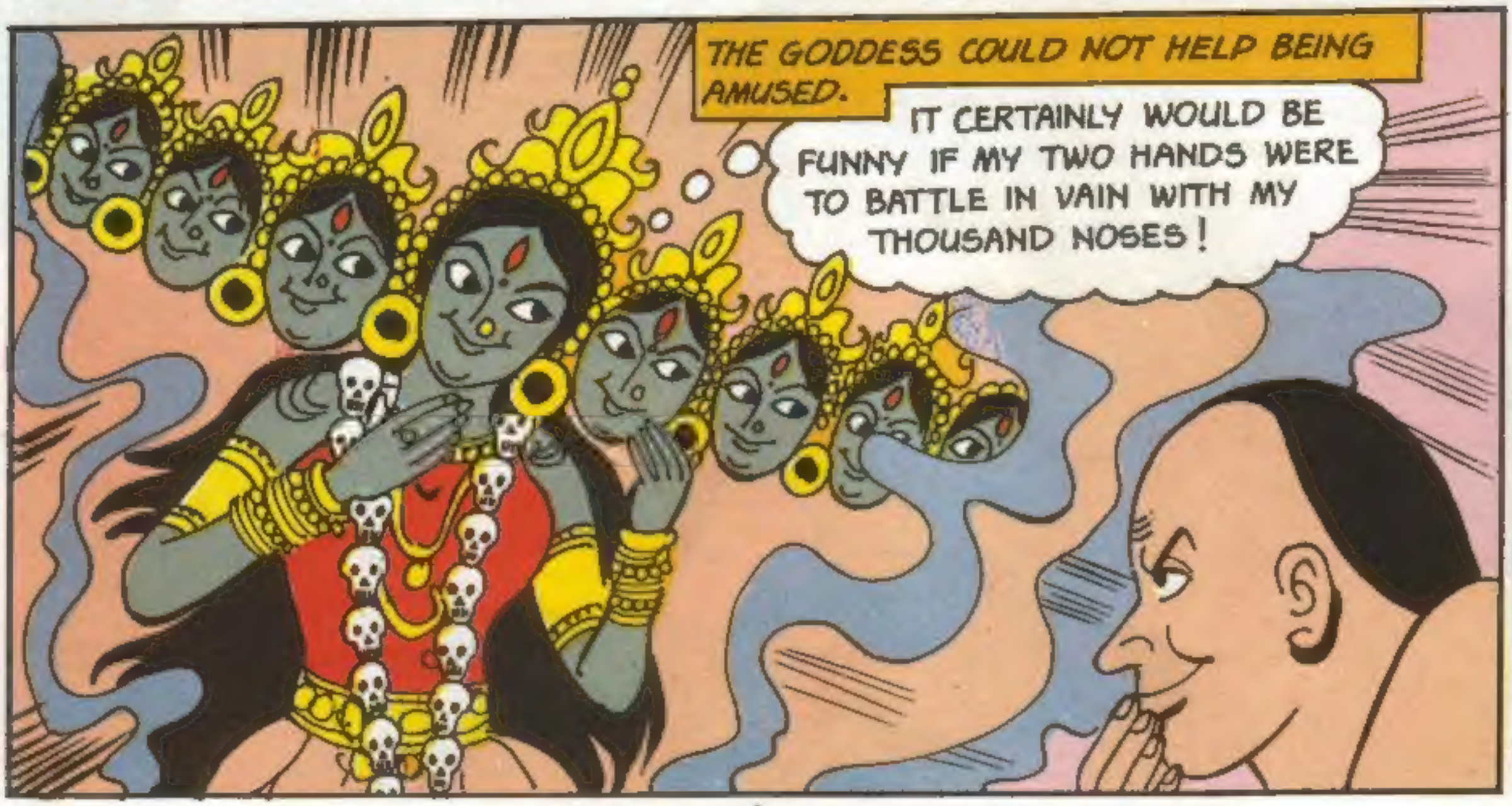

HE CLOSED THE DOOR AND BEGAN REPEATING THE MANTRA.

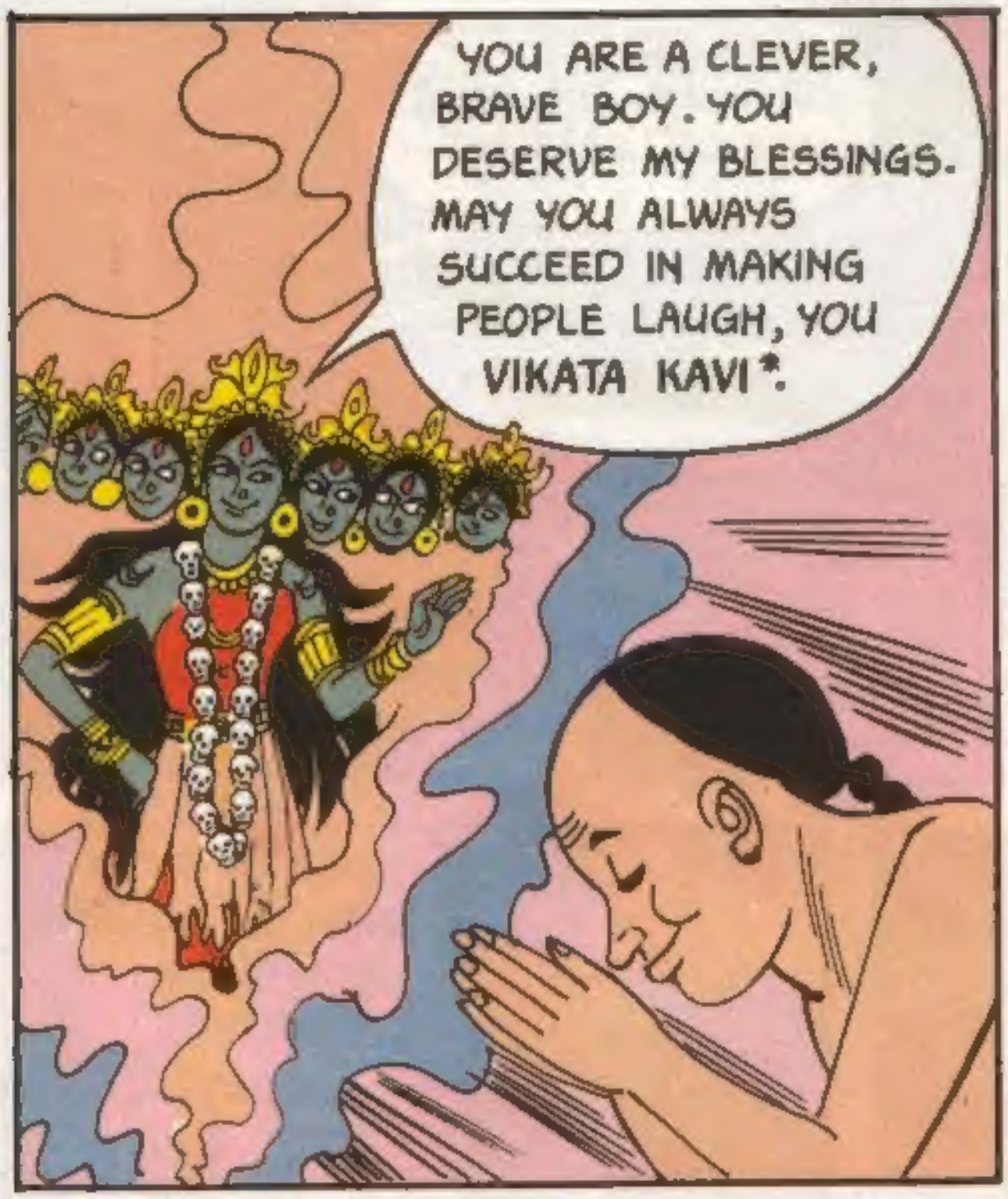
AFTER HE HAD DONE SO FOR THE HUNDRED THOUSANDTH TIME —
I AM PLEASED. I WANT TO BLESS YOU.

IT WAS THE GODDESS! THE MOMENT RAMAN SAW HER, A FUNNY THOUGHT OCCURRED TO HIM AND HE BEGAN TO LAUGH.
HO! HO! HO! HA! HA! HA! HO! HO! HO!

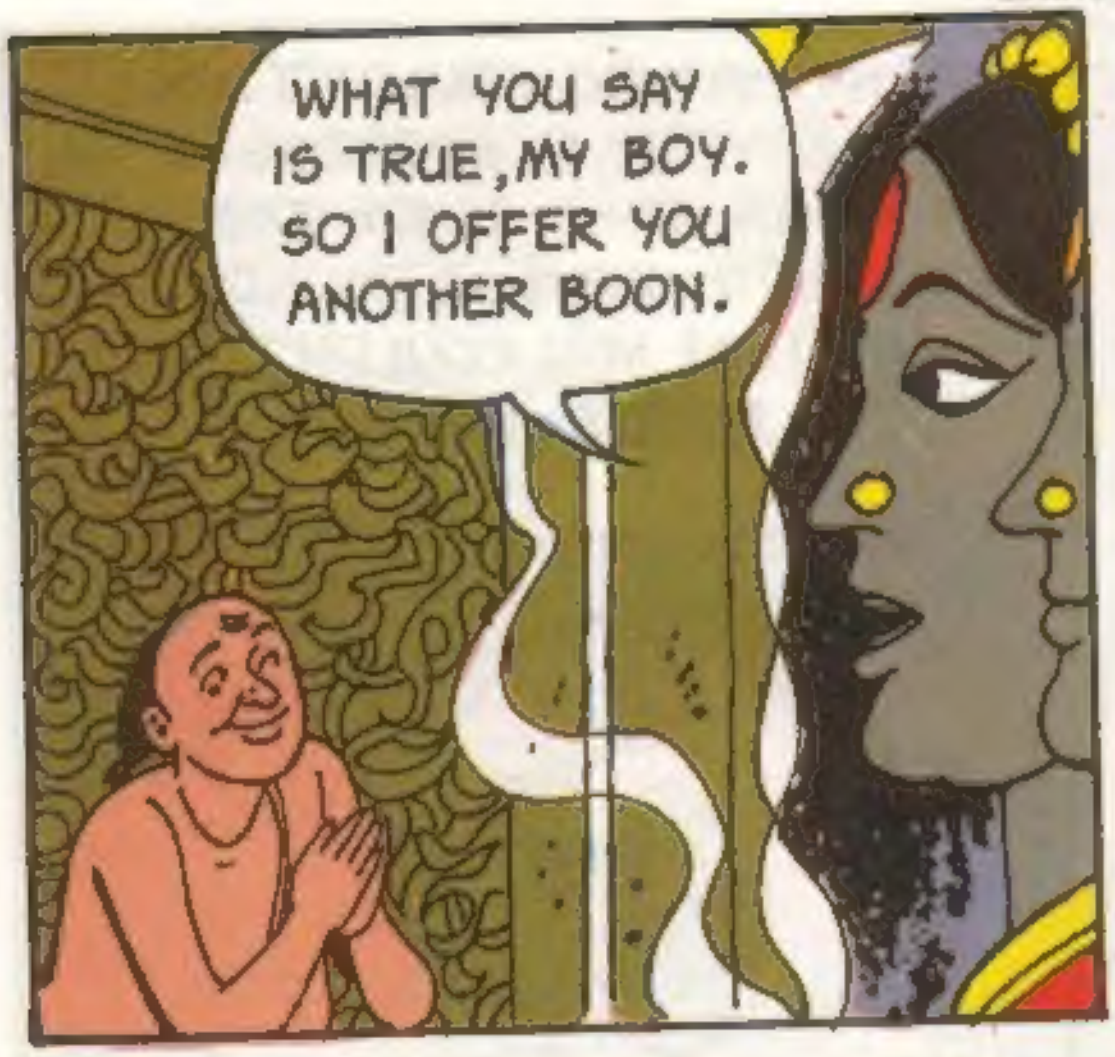
THE GODDESS WAS FURIOUS AT THIS IRREVERENCE.
IMPERTINENT BOY! HOW DARE YOU! STOP THAT LAUGHTER AT ONCE!

HO! HO! FORGIVE ME, GODDESS! BUT—I COULD NOT STOP THIS ONE NOSE WHEN I HAD CAUGHT A COLD. WHAT WOULD YOU DO, I WONDERED, IF YOUR THOUSAND NOSES RAN!


THE GODDESS COULD NOT HELP BEING AMUSED.
IT CERTAINLY WOULD BE FUNNY IF MY TWO HANDS WERE TO BATTLE IN VAIN WITH MY THOUSAND NOSES!



* JESTING POET


WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE, MY BOY. SO I OFFER YOU ANOTHER BOON.

THIS GOLDEN CUP CONTAINS THE SWEET MILK OF LEARNING...

...AND THIS DIAMOND-STUDDED ONE - THE SOUR CURDS OF WEALTH.

ONE OF THEM SHALL BE YOURS. NOW YOU CHOOSE.
BOTH.

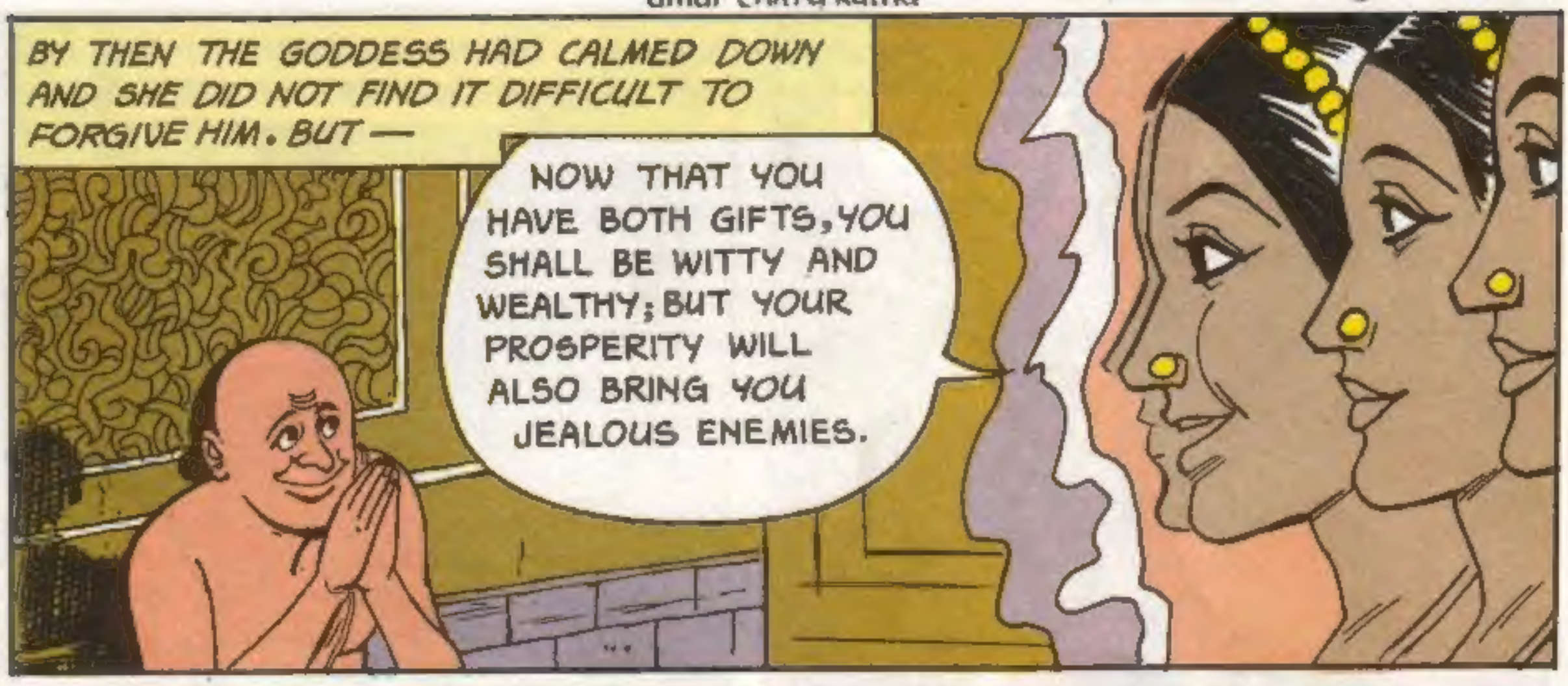
WHY IS THE GIFT OF WEALTH OFFERED IN THE FORM OF CURDS?
BECAUSE WEALTH IS SELDOM ATTAINED BY PLEASANT MEANS.

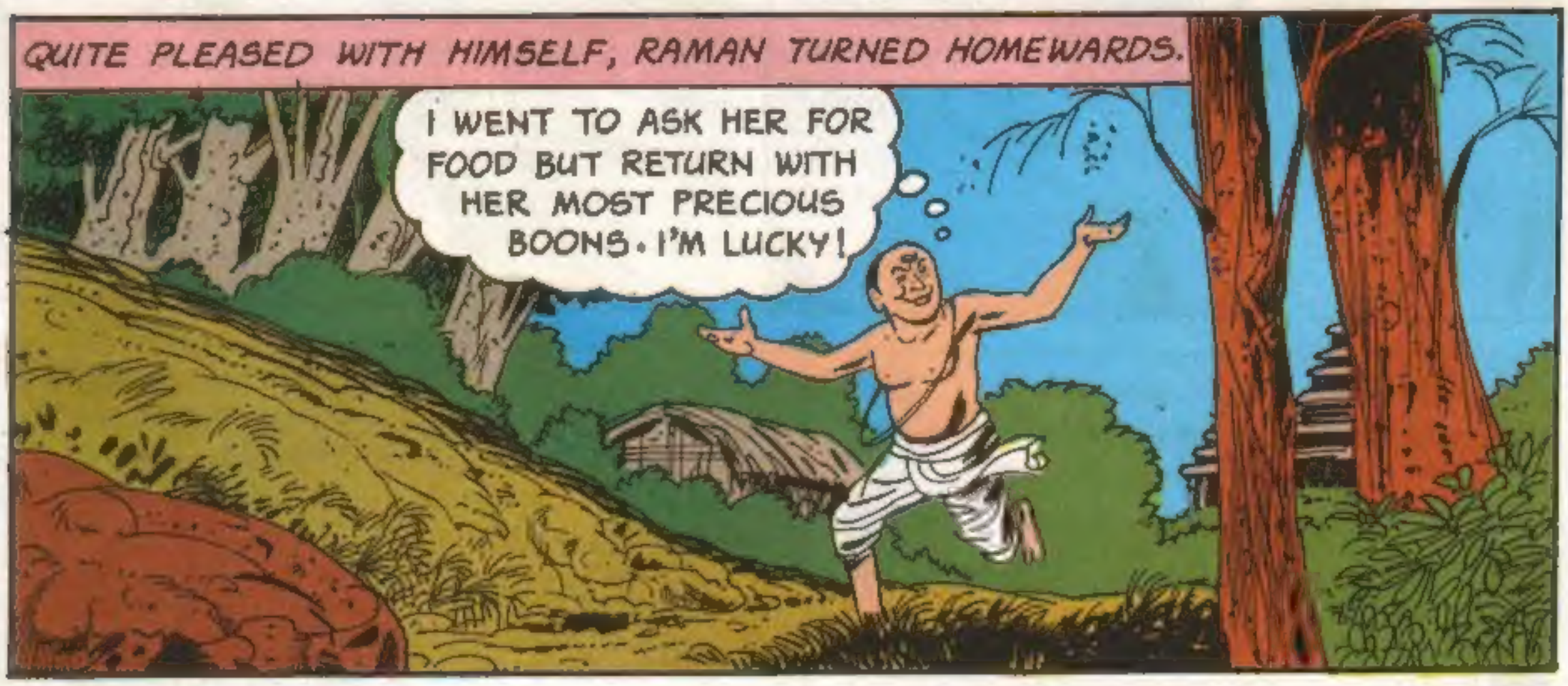
RAMAN WAS QUIET FOR A MOMENT. THEN —
O GODDESS, HOW CAN I CHOOSE WITHOUT FIRST TASTING BOTH?
THAT'S TRUE.

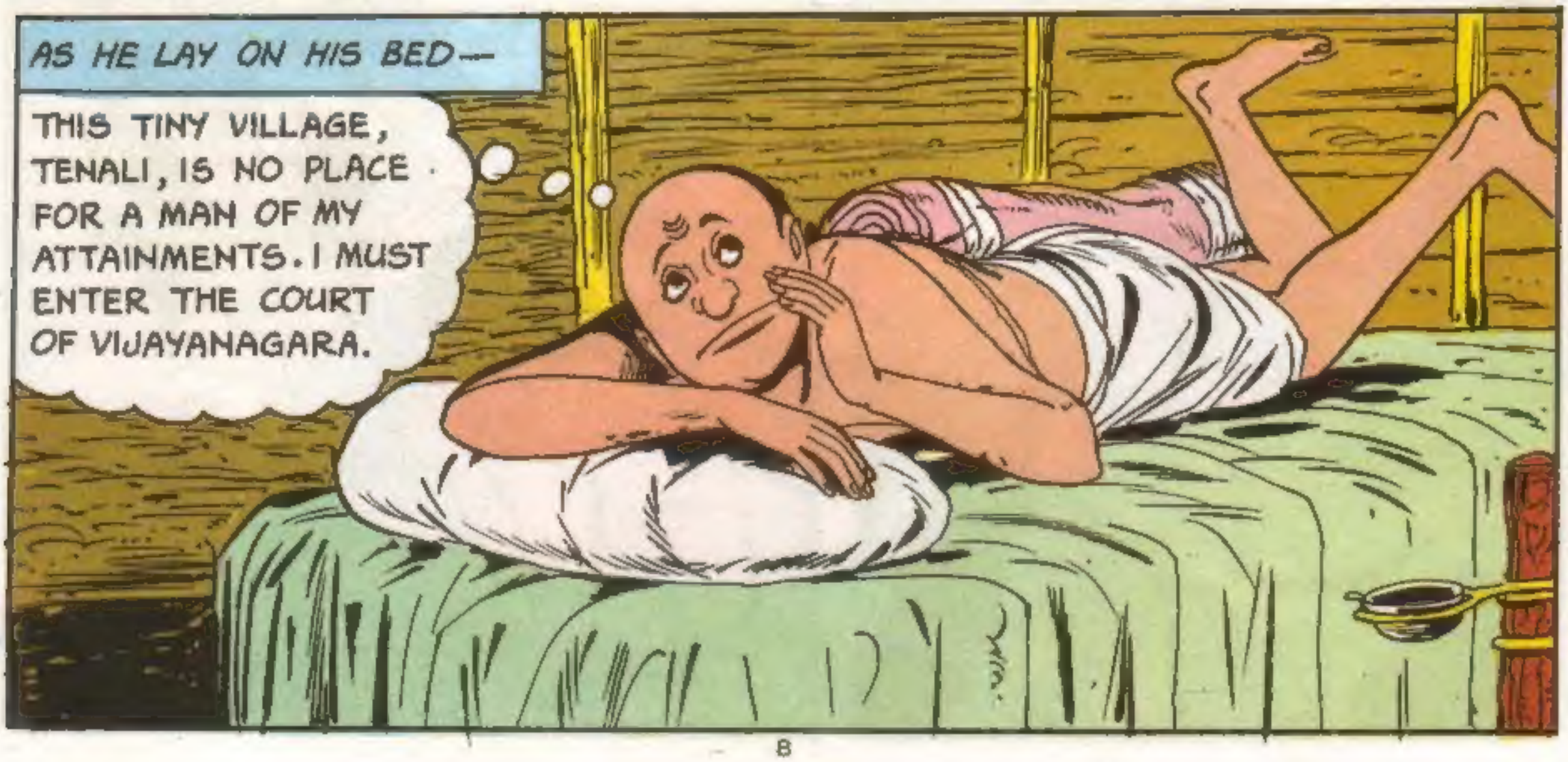
WITHOUT THINKING, THE GODDESS HELD OUT THE CUPS.
!

BEFORE SHE KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING, RAMAN GULPED DOWN THE CONTENTS OF BOTH CUPS.

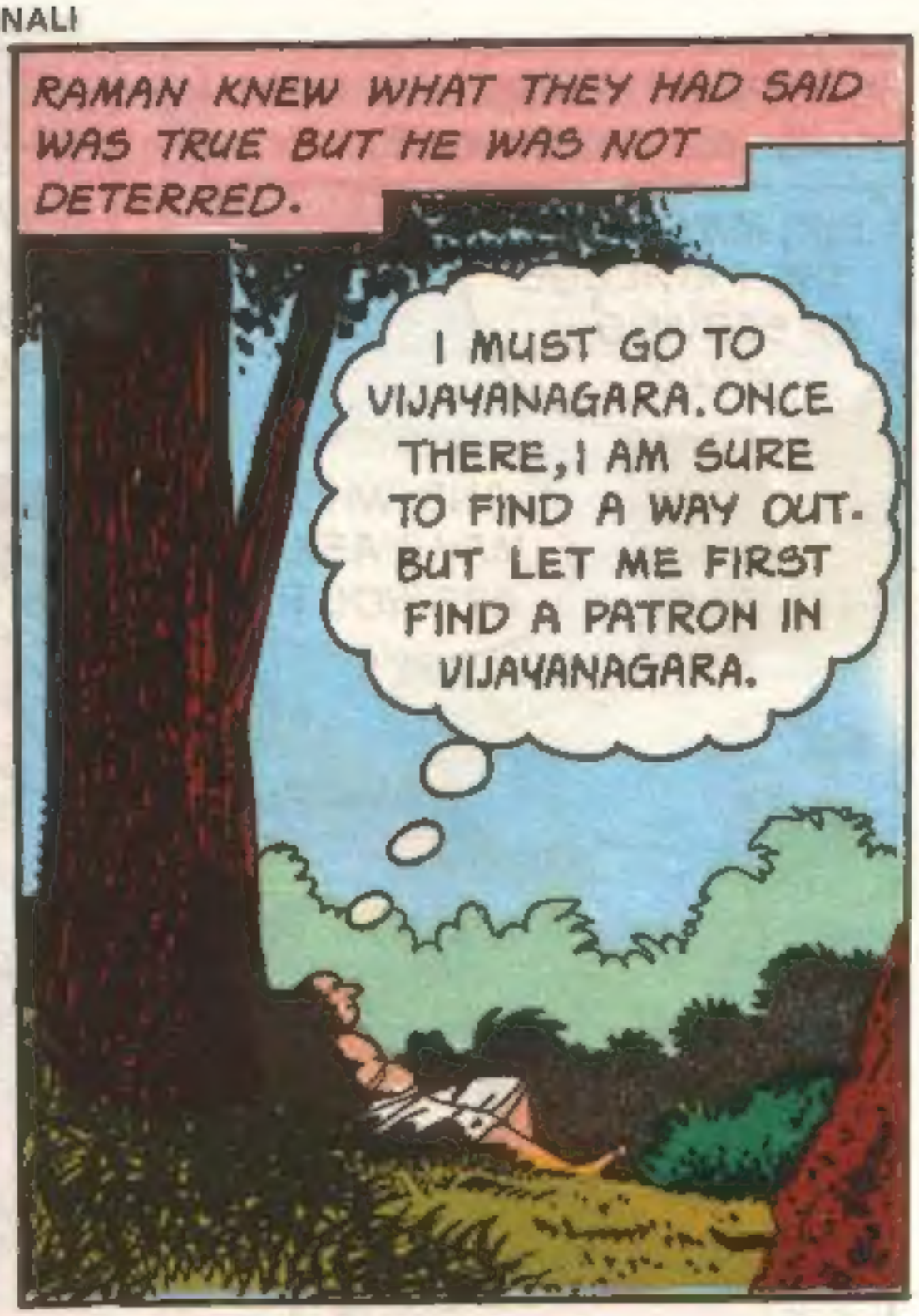
TOO LATE, THE GODDESS REALISED SHE HAD BEEN TRICKED. SHE WAS FURIOUS. BUT RAMAN BOWED HUMBLY BEFORE HER.
O GODDESS, FORGIVE ME. AS YOU KNOW, THE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER WOULD BE USELESS TO ME. I HAD TO HAVE BOTH.
?


BY THEN THE GODDESS HAD CALMED DOWN AND SHE DID NOT FIND IT DIFFICULT TO FORGIVE HIM. BUT —
NOW THAT YOU HAVE BOTH GIFTS, YOU SHALL BE WITTY AND WEALTHY; BUT YOUR PROSPERITY WILL ALSO BRING YOU JEALOUS ENEMIES.


QUITE PLEASED WITH HIMSELF, RAMAN TURNED HOMEWARDS.
I WENT TO ASK HER FOR FOOD BUT RETURN WITH HER MOST PRECIOUS BOONS. I'M LUCKY!


AS HE LAY ON HIS BED—
THIS TINY VILLAGE, TENALI, IS NO PLACE FOR A MAN OF MY ATTAINMENTS. I MUST ENTER THE COURT OF VIJAYANAGARA.

THE NEXT DAY WHEN HE SPOKE OF IT TO HIS FRIENDS —
ARE YOU MAD, RAMAN ?
THE PALACE IS NO PLACE FOR RUSTICS.
THOSE HEFTY GUARDS AT THE GATES WILL THROW YOU OUT.


RAMAN KNEW WHAT THEY HAD SAID WAS TRUE BUT HE WAS NOT DETERRED.
I MUST GO TO VIJAYANAGARA. ONCE THERE, I AM SURE TO FIND A WAY OUT. BUT LET ME FIRST FIND A PATRON IN VIJAYANAGARA.

RAMAN SPENT HIS DAYS WONDERING HOW TO GET A PATRON. THEN SUDDENLY, ONE DAY —
WHAT'S ALL THE COMMOTION ABOUT ?
DON'T YOU KNOW ? THE RAJGURU* HAS COME FROM VIJAYANAGARA TO WORSHIP AT THE SHRINE OF MANGALA-GIRI.

RAMAN WAS OVERJOYED.
I KNEW IT WOULD HAPPEN. I KNEW LUCK WOULD COME MY WAY.

* KING'S GURU

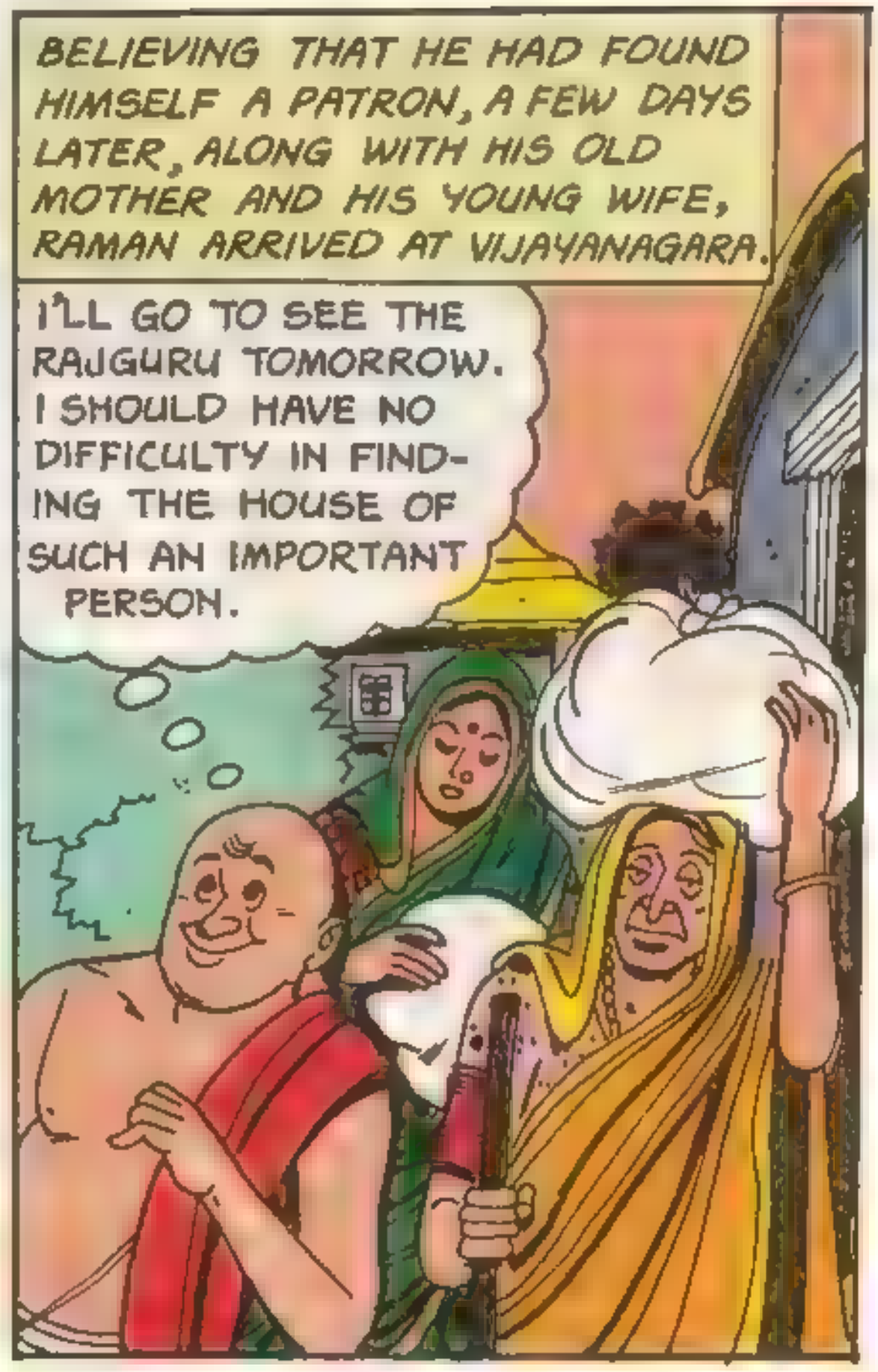
RAMAN FOLLOWED THE RAJ-GURU TO THE SHRINE.
SIR, MAY I HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF SERVING YOU?
AND WHO, MAY I ASK, ARE YOU?

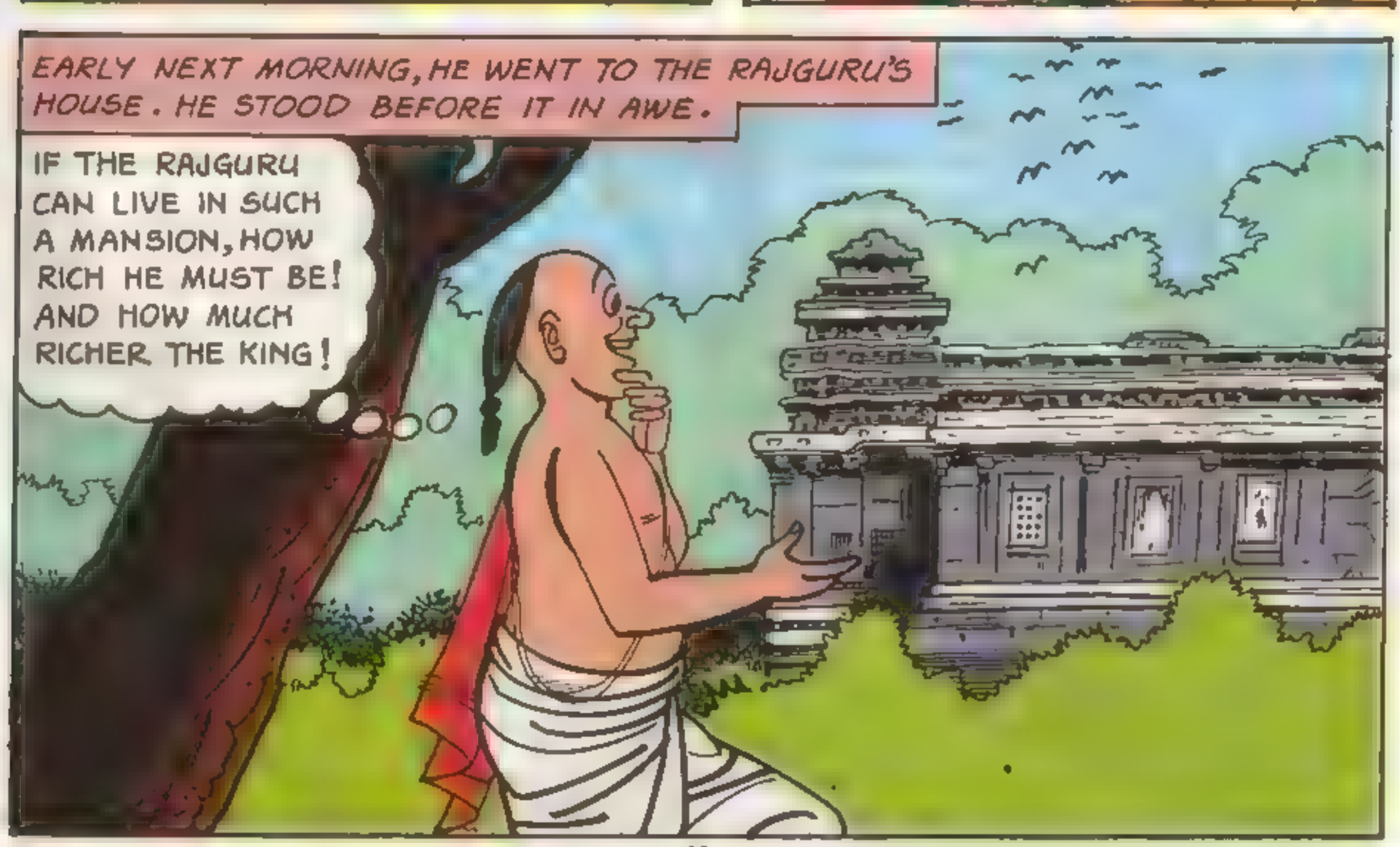
WHEN RAMAN TOLD HIM —
WHY NOT MAKE USE OF THE IGNORANT VILLAGE BUMPKIN?

ALL RIGHT, I AM ON MY WAY TO THE RIVER TO BATHE. YOU MAY CARRY MY TOWEL FOR ME.

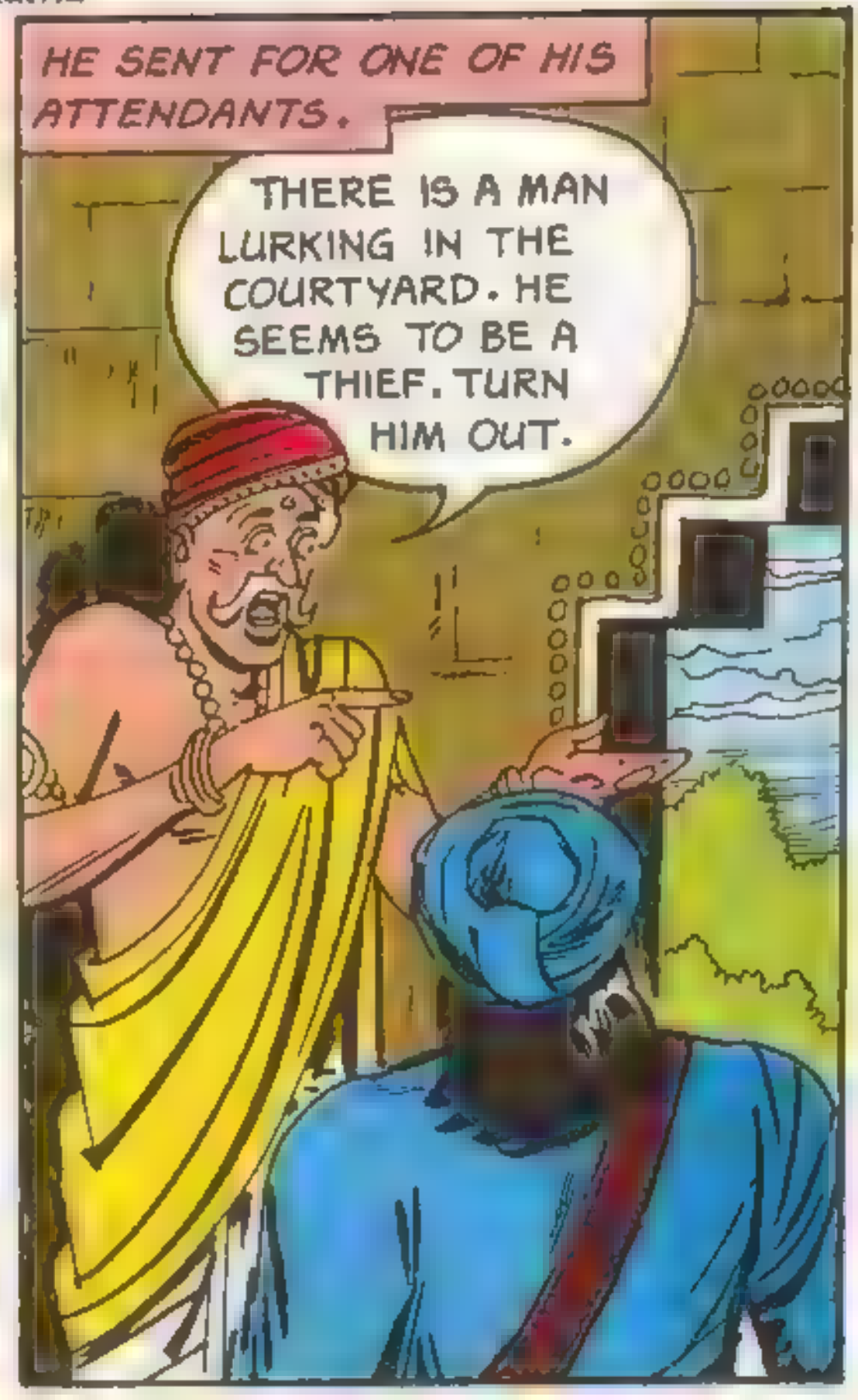
SIR, I TOO HOPE TO BELONG TO THE COURT OF VIJAYANAGARA, SOME DAY.
WELL, WHY NOT? BUT WHAT WILL YOU DO THERE?

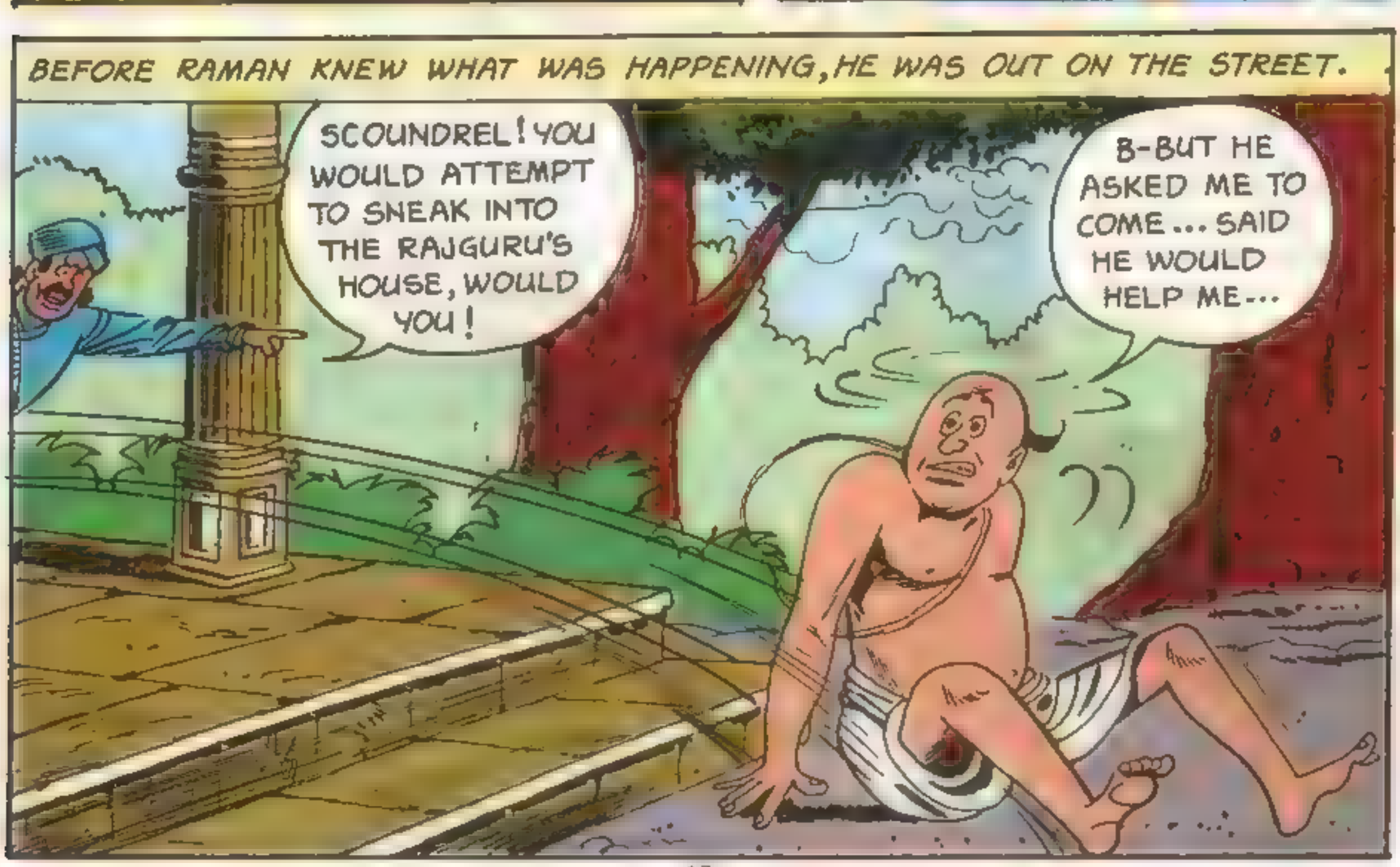
I'LL BECOME THE COURT JESTER, SIR.
IMPERTINENT FOOL! DO YOU THINK IT IS SO EASY TO ENTER THE COURT?
ALL RIGHT. YOU MAY COME TO VIJAYANAGARA AND WE'LL SEE.


BELIEVING THAT HE HAD FOUND HIMSELF A PATRON, A FEW DAYS LATER, ALONG WITH HIS OLD MOTHER AND HIS YOUNG WIFE, RAMAN ARRIVED AT VIJAYANAGARA.
I'LL GO TO SEE THE RAJGURU TOMORROW. I SHOULD HAVE NO DIFFICULTY IN FINDING THE HOUSE OF SUCH AN IMPORTANT PERSON.


EARLY NEXT MORNING, HE WENT TO THE RAJGURU'S HOUSE. HE STOOD BEFORE IT IN AWE.
IF THE RAJGURU CAN LIVE IN SUCH A MANSION, HOW RICH HE MUST BE! AND HOW MUCH RICHER THE KING!

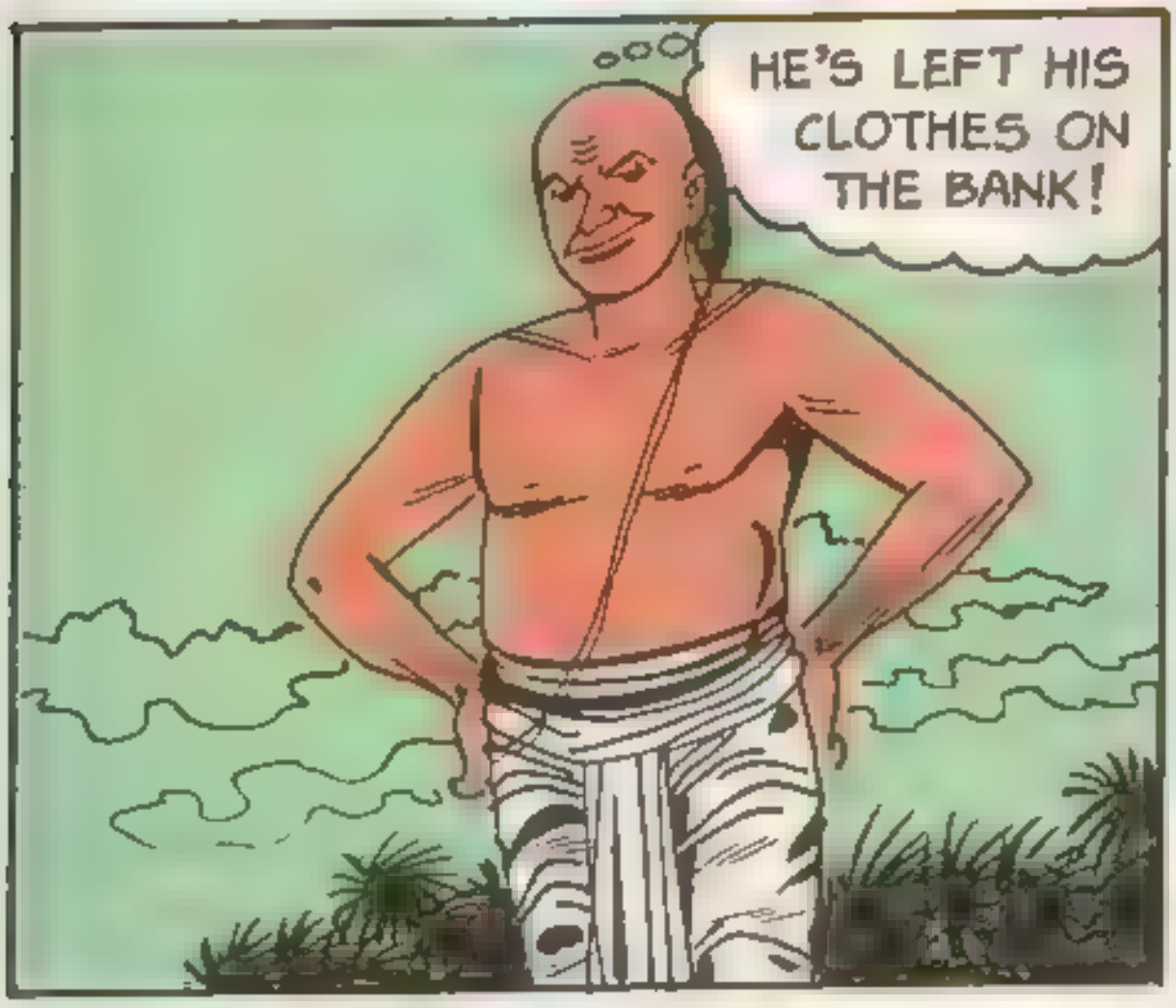
MEANWHILE, THE RAJGURU HAD SEEN RAMAN FROM ONE OF HIS WINDOWS.
WHY! THE FOOL HAS INDEED COME!

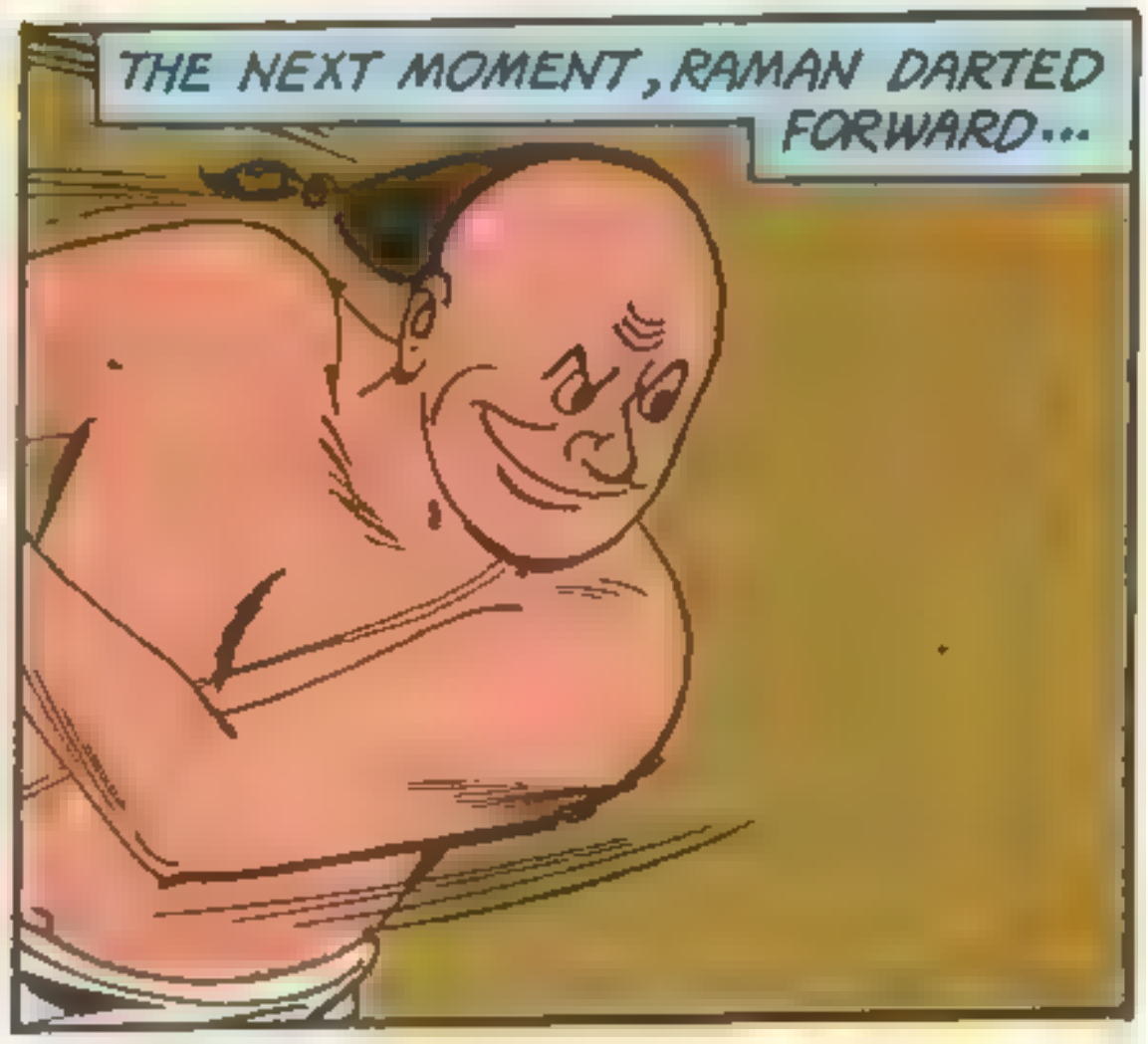

HE SENT FOR ONE OF HIS ATTENDANTS.
THERE IS A MAN LURKING IN THE COURTYARD. HE SEEMS TO BE A THIEF. TURN HIM OUT.

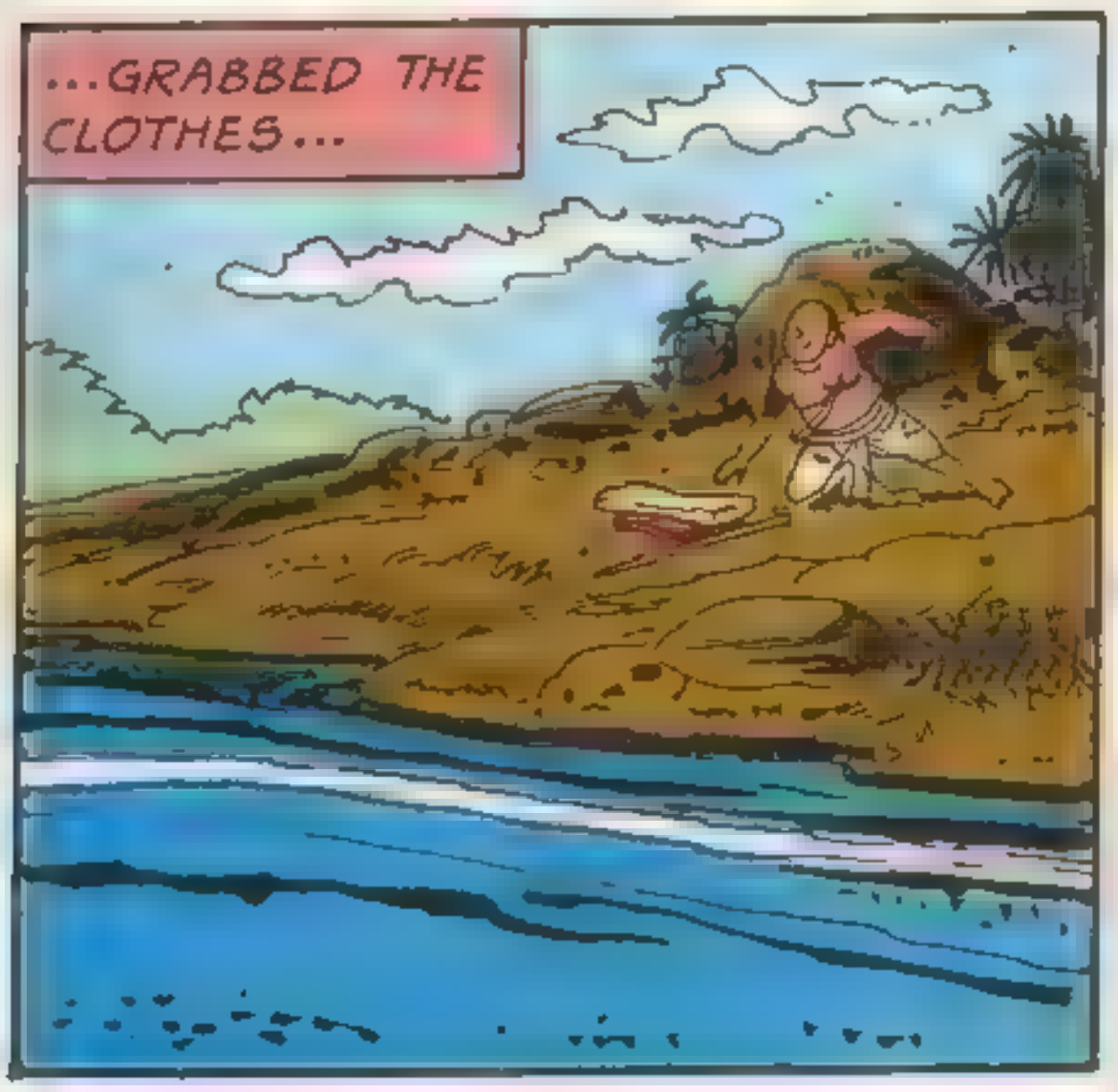

BEFORE RAMAN KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING, HE WAS OUT ON THE STREET.
SCOUNDREL! YOU WOULD ATTEMPT TO SNEAK INTO THE RAJGURU'S HOUSE, WOULD YOU!
B-BUT HE ASKED ME TO COME... SAID HE WOULD HELP ME...

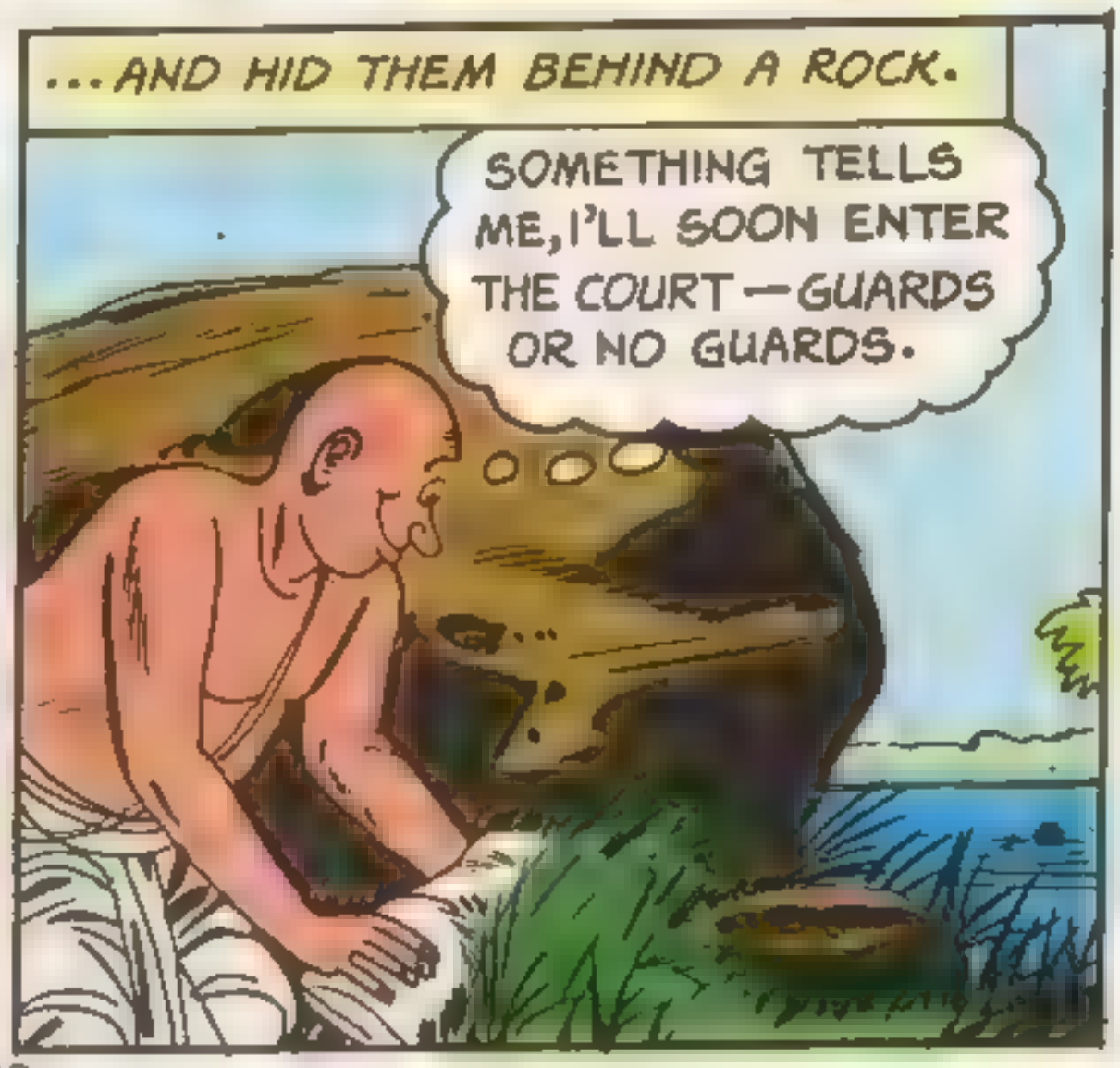
A CRESTFALLEN RAMAN SPENT THE NEXT FEW DAYS WANDERING AIMLESSLY ABOUT THE CITY. THEN EARLY ONE MORNING AS HE PASSED BY THE TUNGABHADRA RIVER —

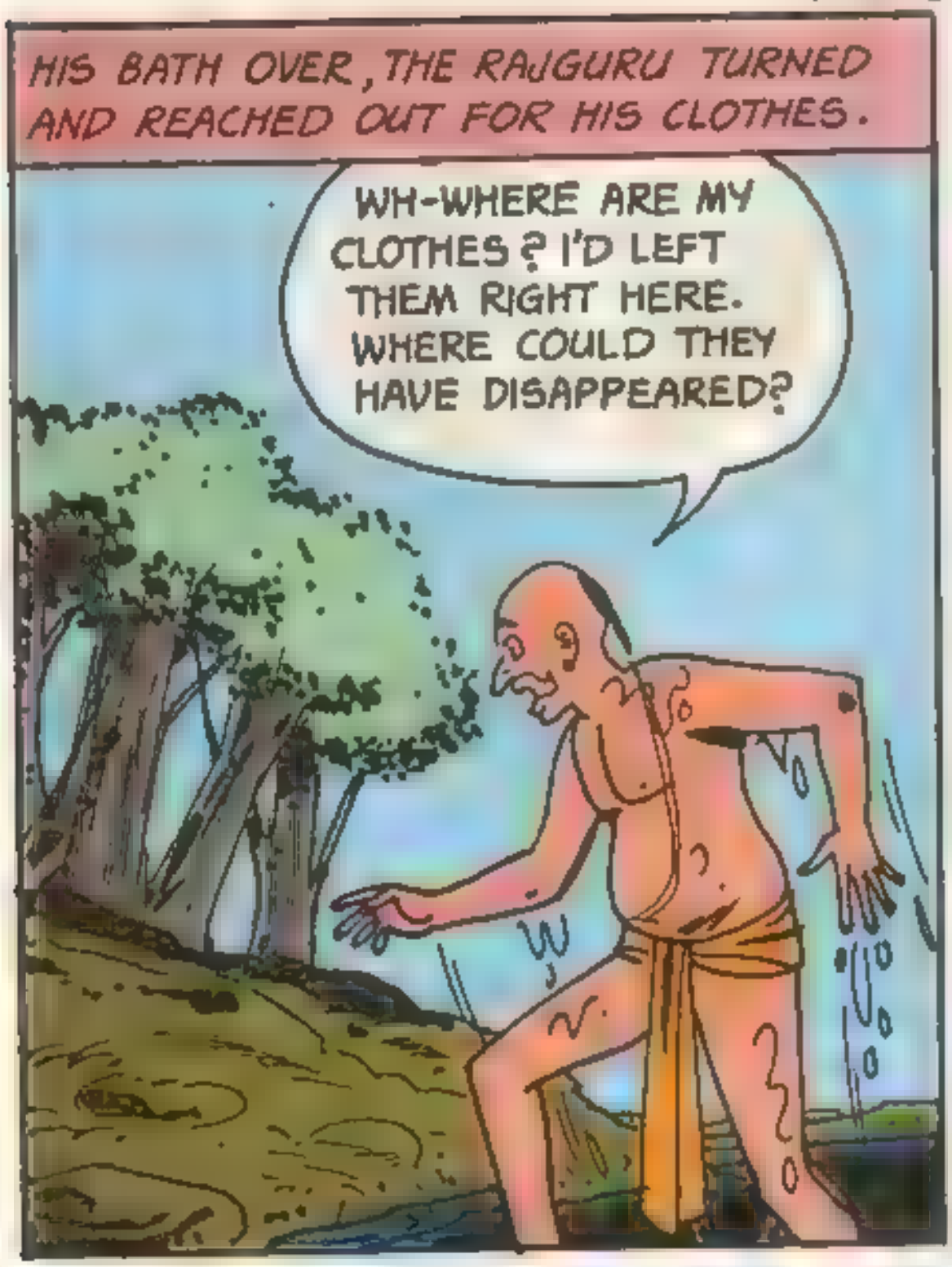
WHY, IF IT ISN'T THE RAJGURU ABOUT TO GO IN FOR HIS BATH!

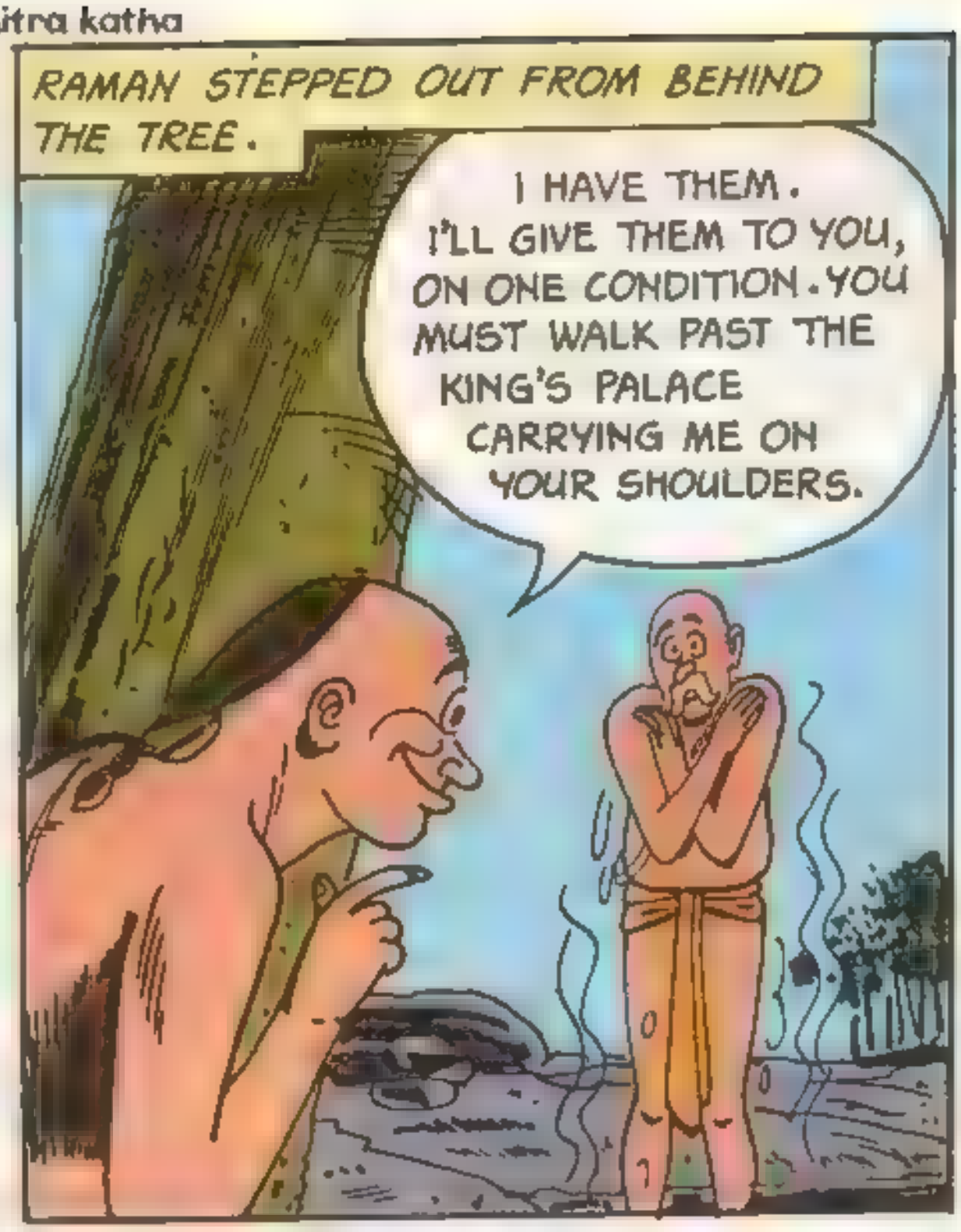




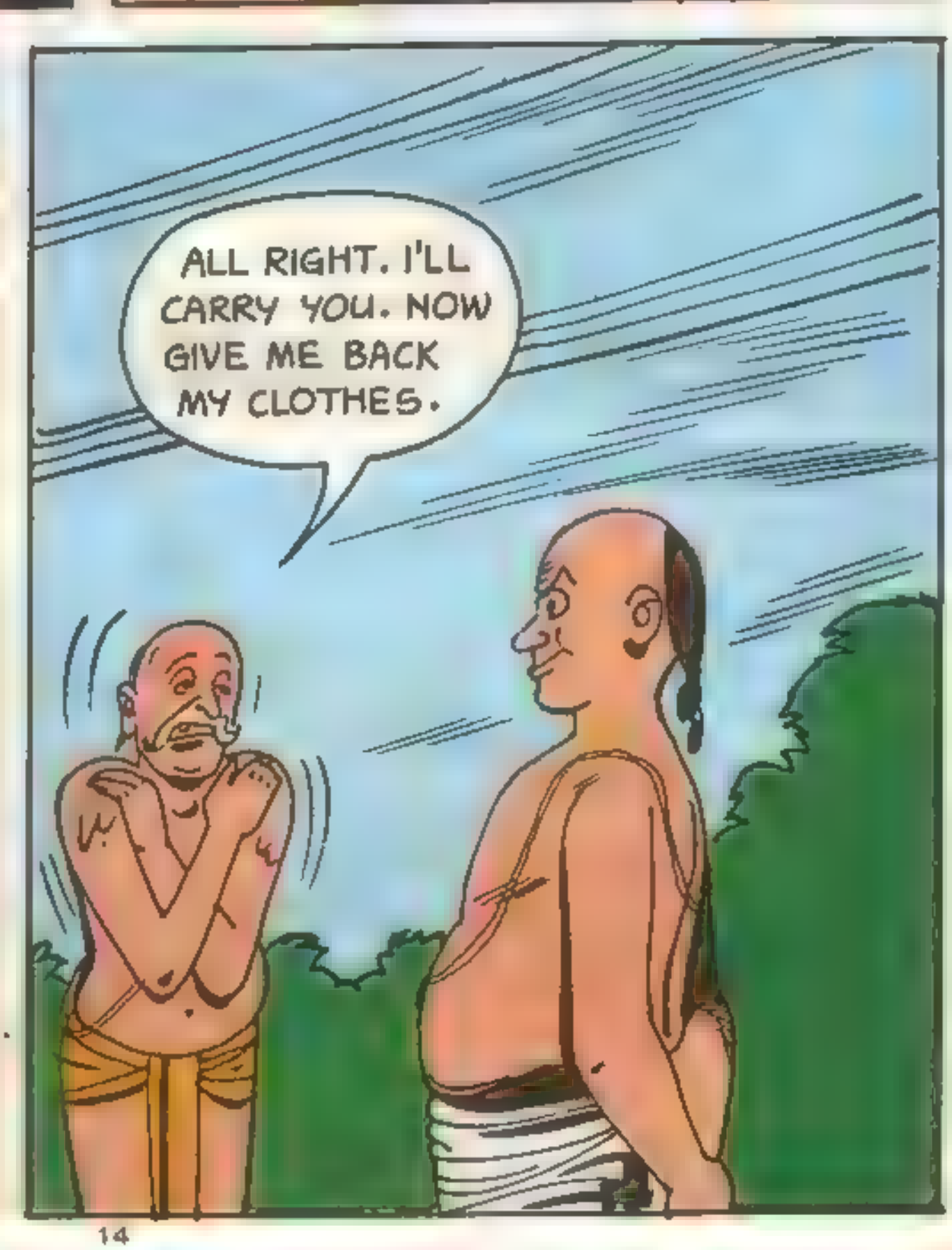


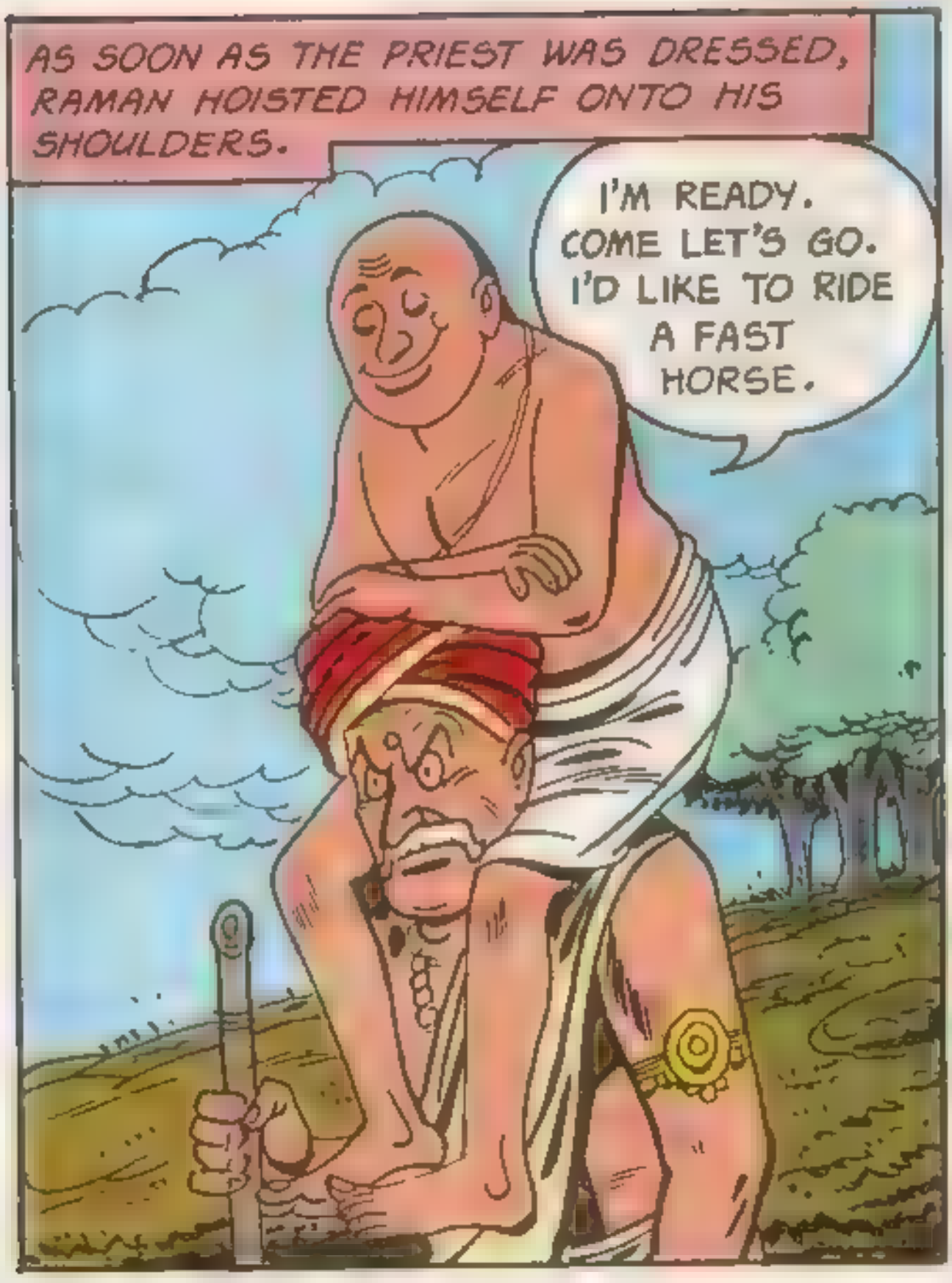


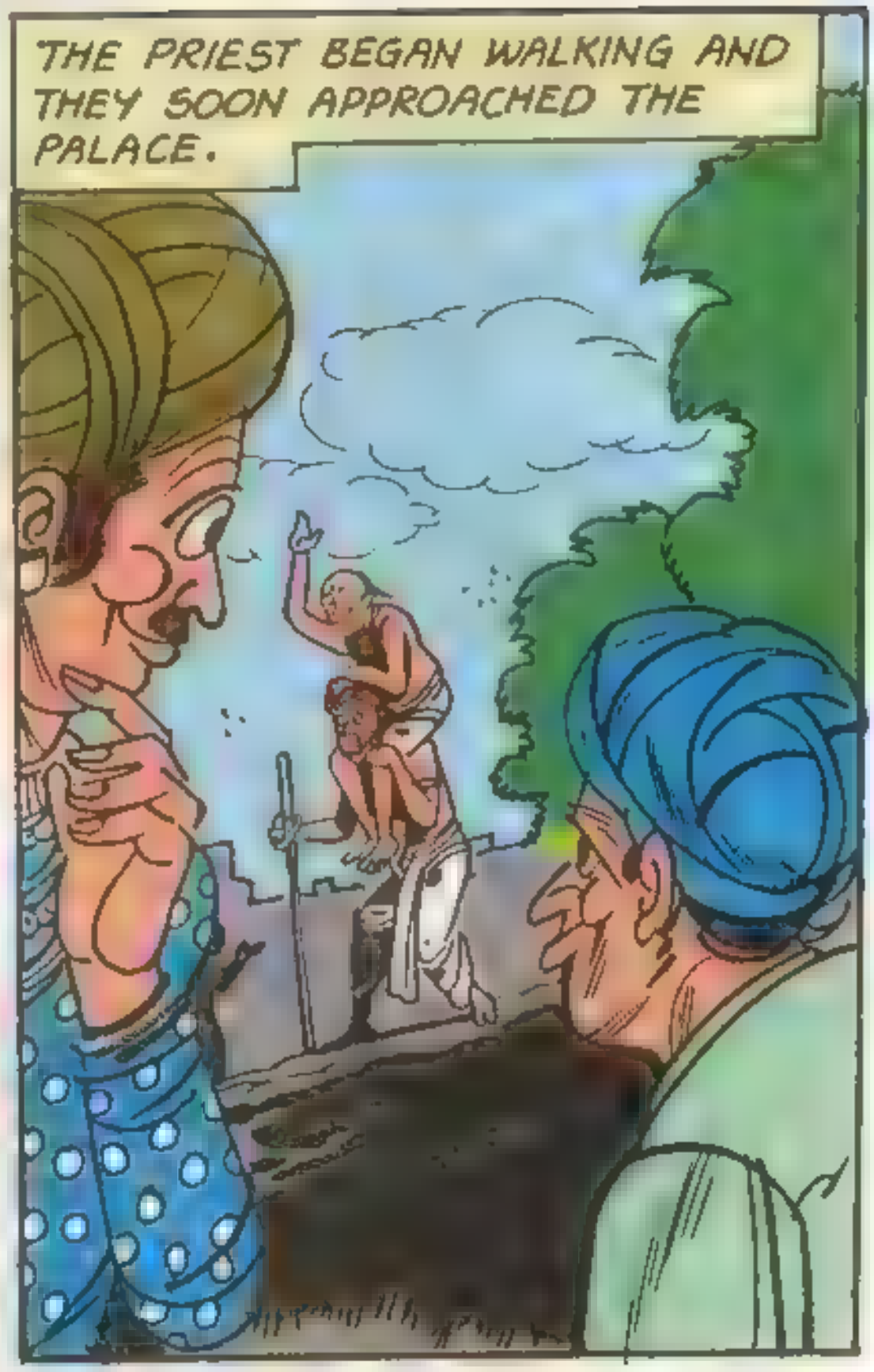

HIS BATH OVER, THE RAJGURU TURNED AND REACHED OUT FOR HIS CLOTHES.
WH-WHERE ARE MY CLOTHES? I'D LEFT THEM RIGHT HERE. WHERE COULD THEY HAVE DISAPPEARED?

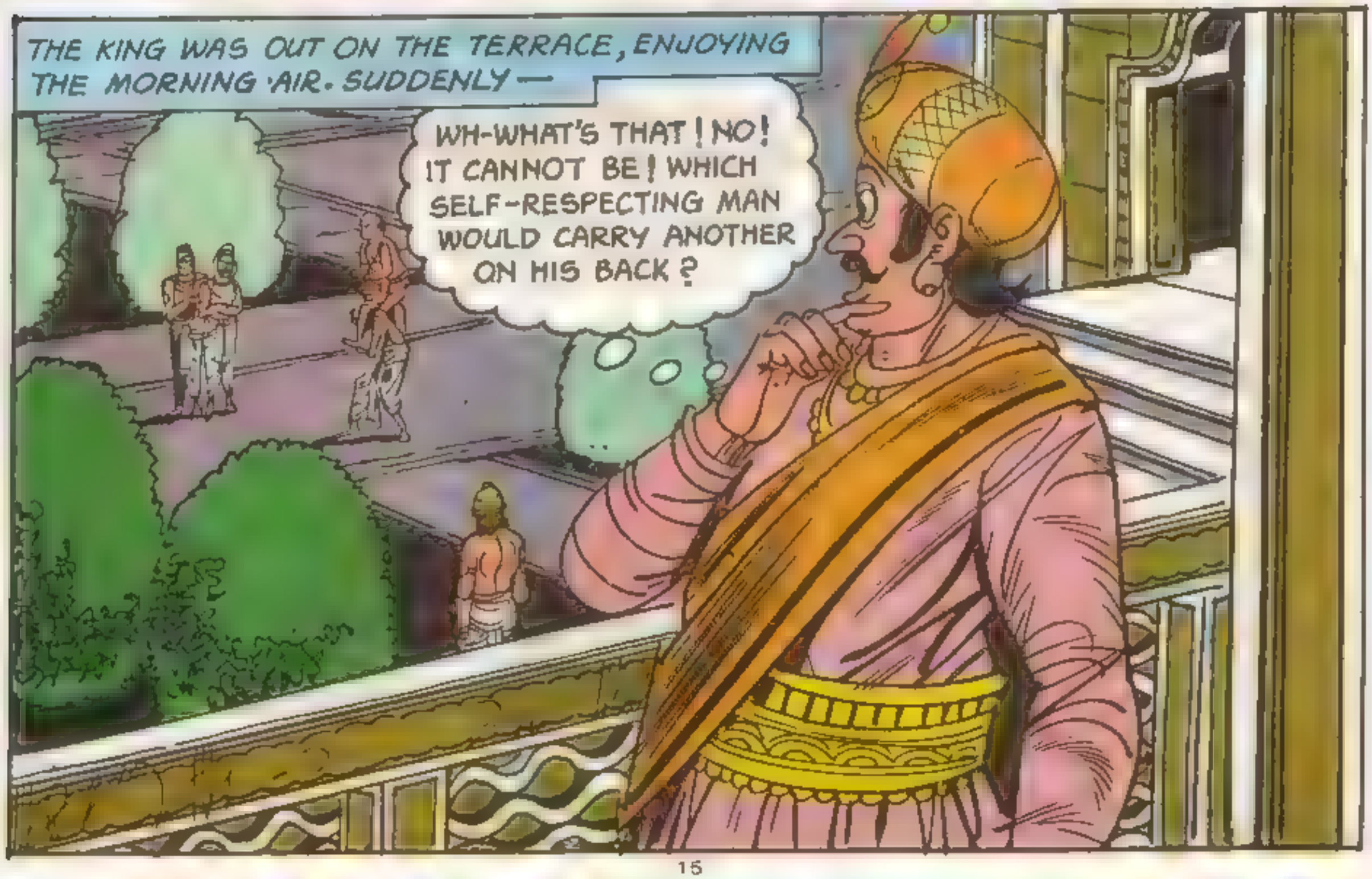

RAMAN STEPPED OUT FROM BEHIND THE TREE.
I HAVE THEM. I'LL GIVE THEM TO YOU, ON ONE CONDITION. YOU MUST WALK PAST THE KING'S PALACE CARRYING ME ON YOUR SHOULDERS.

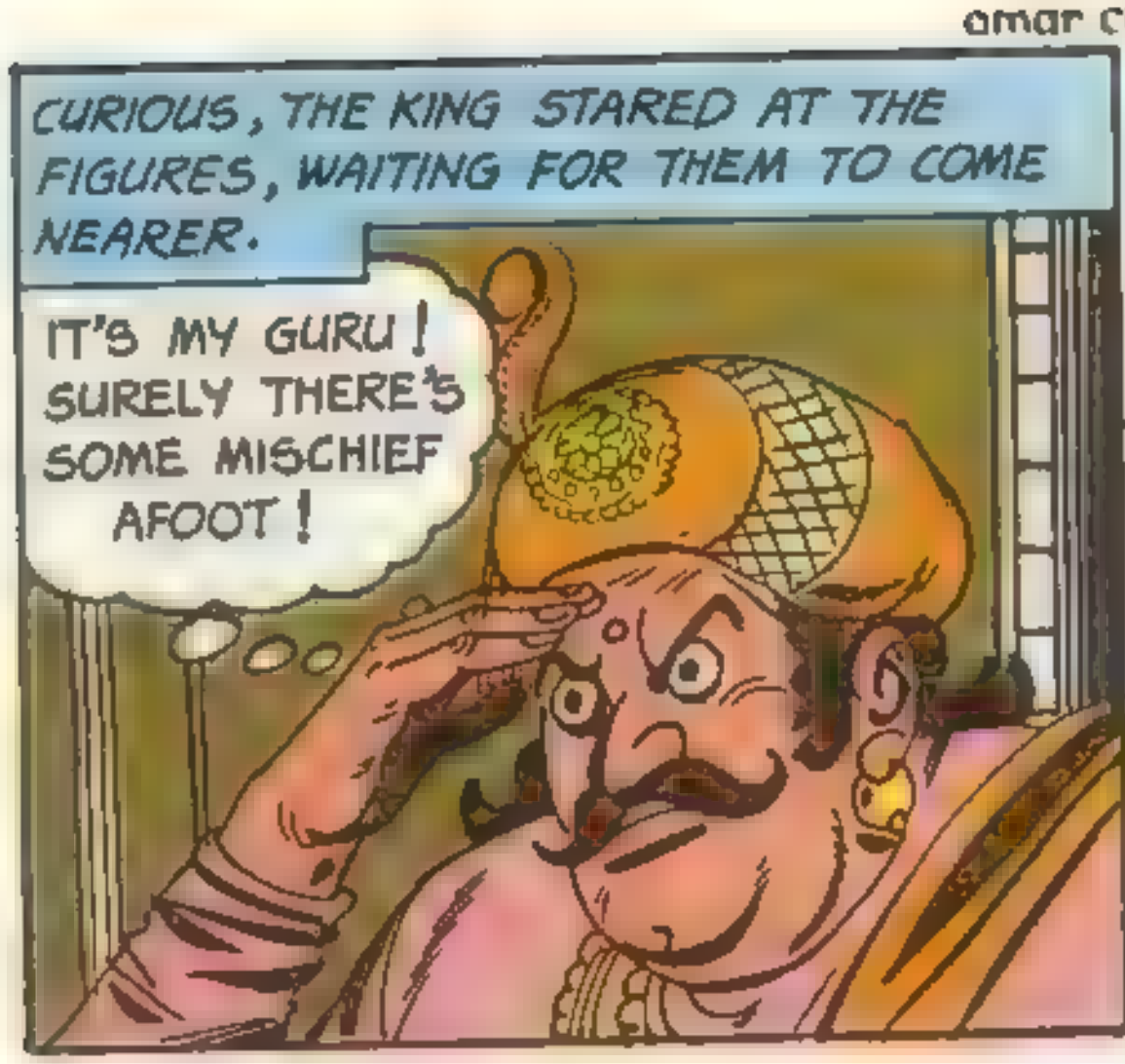
THE RAJGURU HAD TO AGREE.
THE FELLOW MUST BE MAD! BUT I'LL HAVE TO HUMOUR HIM OR CATCH MY DEATH IN THIS ICY WATER.

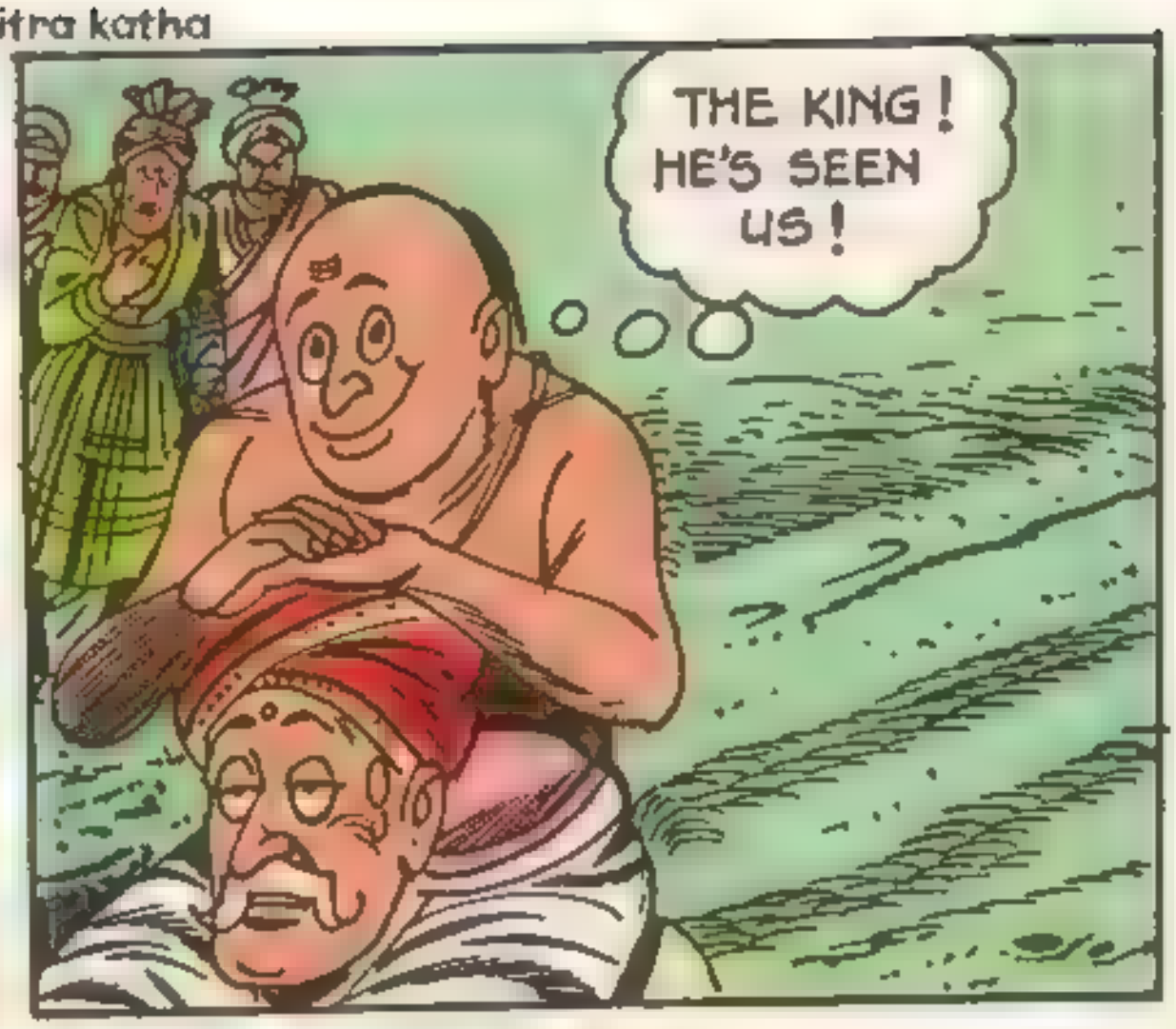

ALL RIGHT. I'LL CARRY YOU. NOW GIVE ME BACK MY CLOTHES.

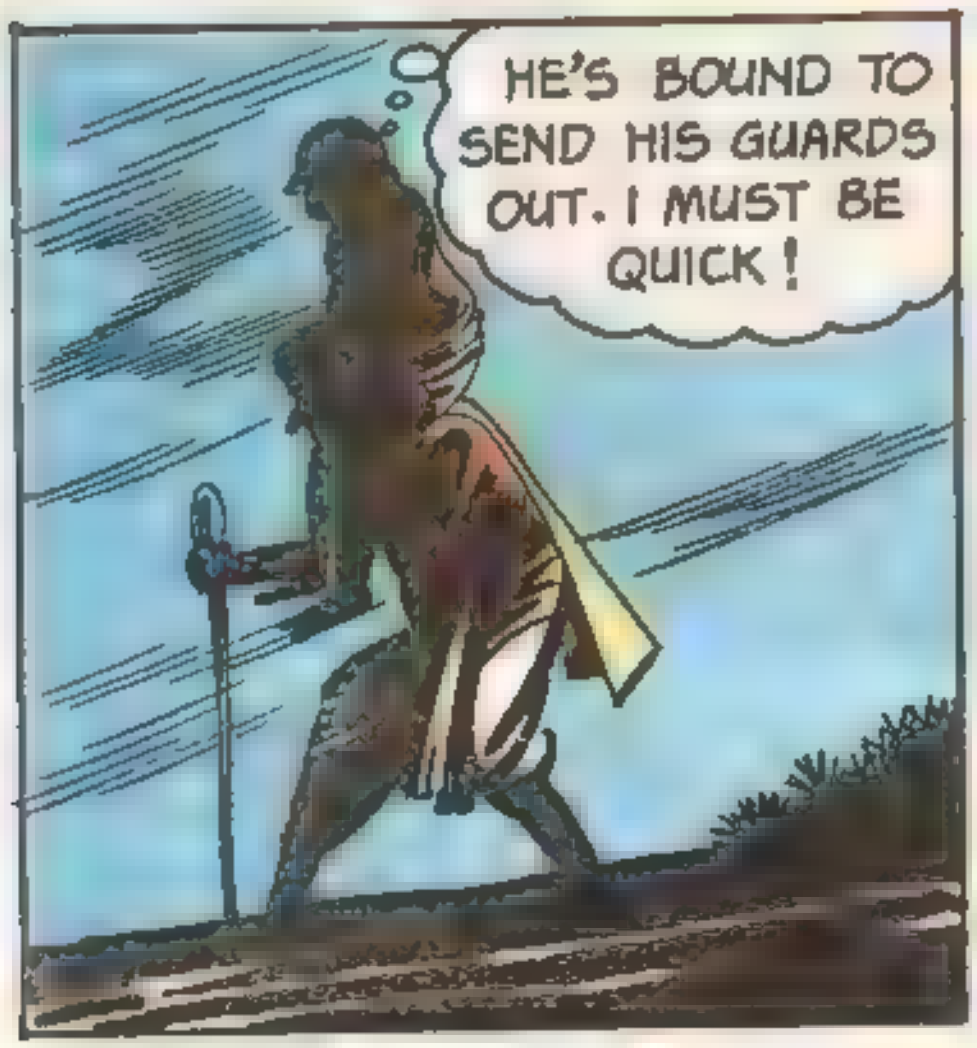

AS SOON AS THE PRIEST WAS DRESSED, RAMAN HOISTED HIMSELF ONTO HIS SHOULDERS.
I'M READY. COME LET'S GO. I'D LIKE TO RIDE A FAST HORSE.

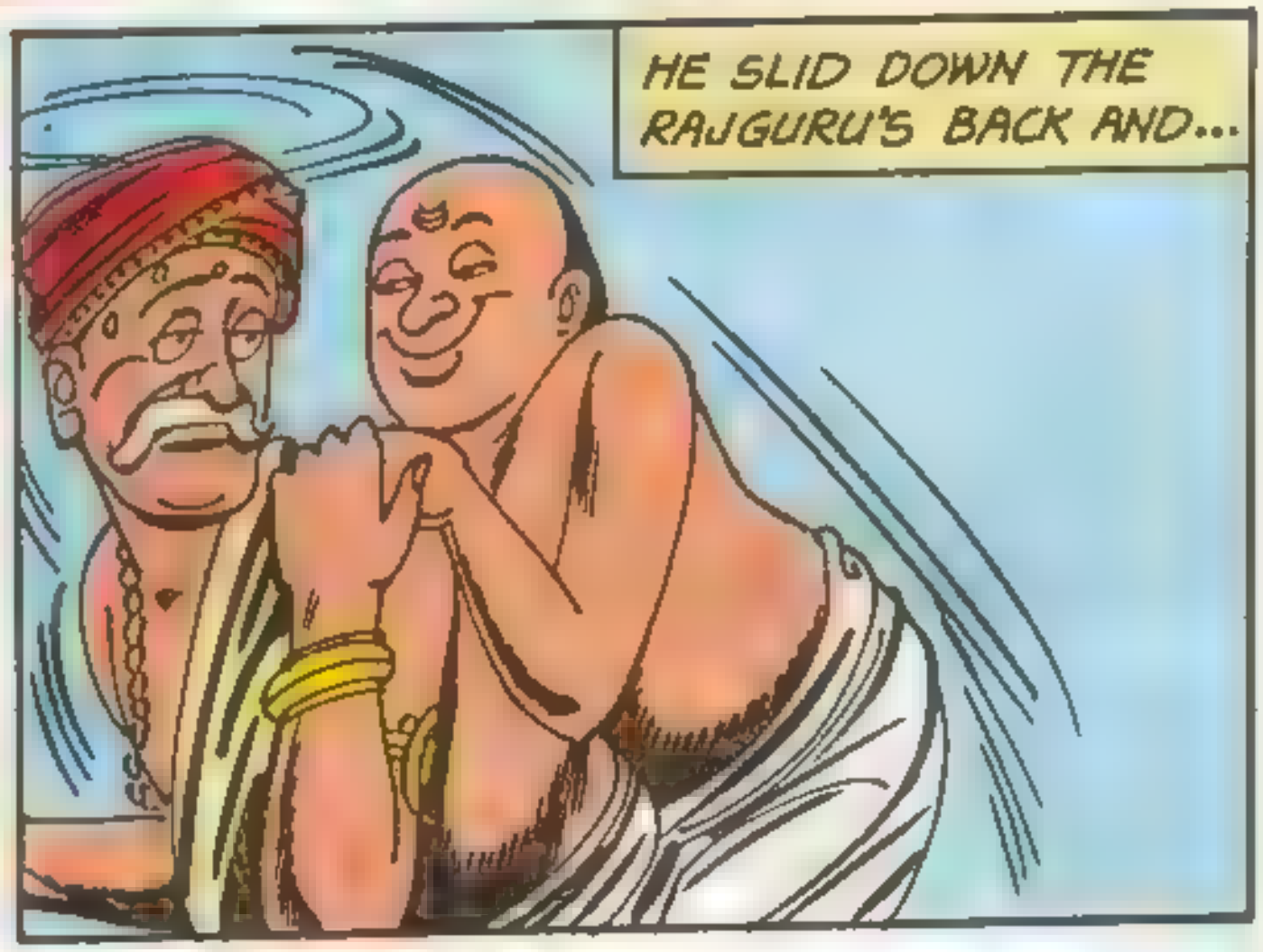

THE PRIEST BEGAN WALKING AND THEY SOON APPROACHED THE PALACE.

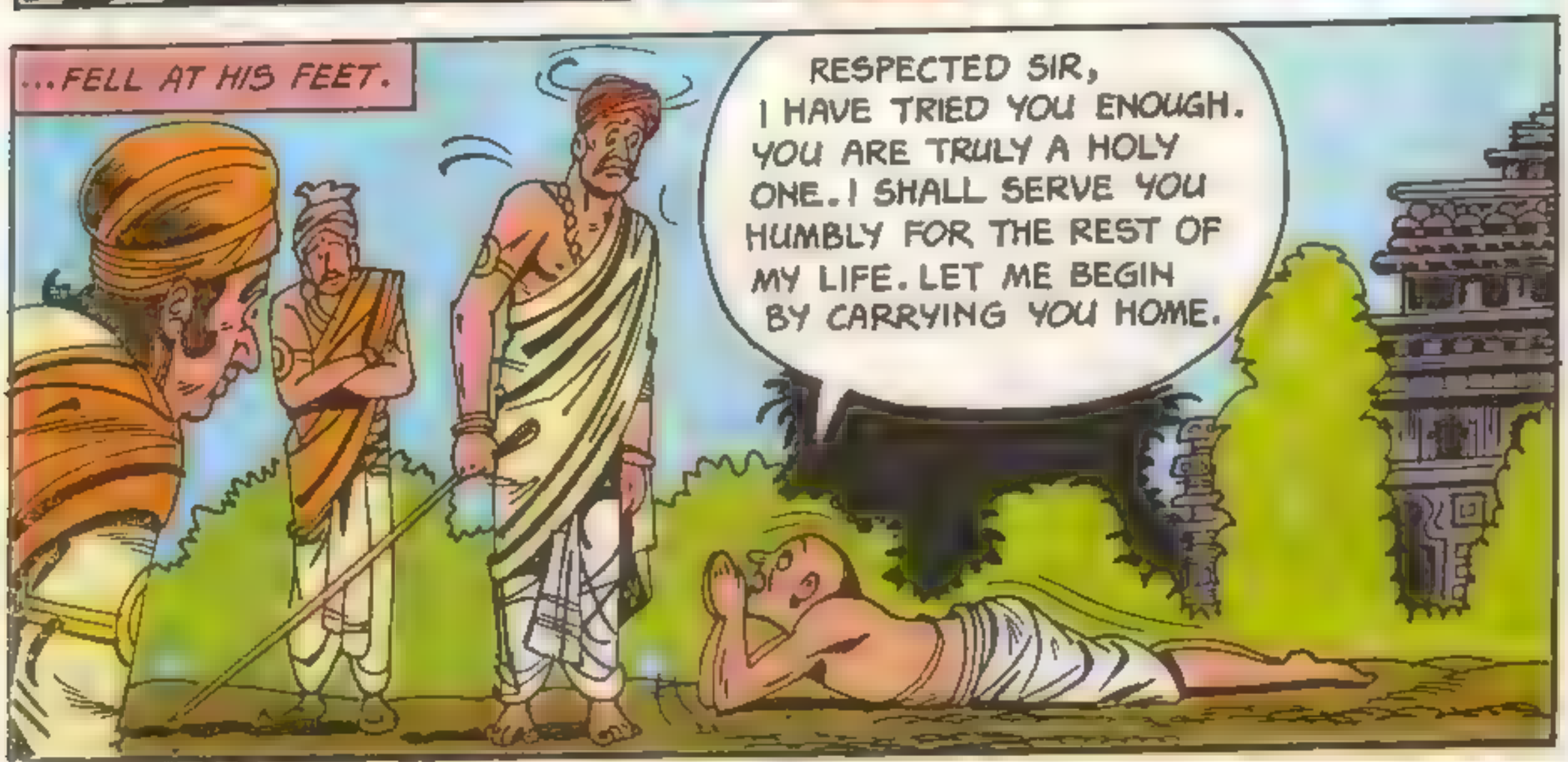

THE KING WAS OUT ON THE TERRACE, ENJOYING THE MORNING AIR. SUDDENLY —
WH-WHAT'S THAT! NO! IT CANNOT BE! WHICH SELF-RESPECTING MAN WOULD CARRY ANOTHER ON HIS BACK?


CURIOUS, THE KING STARED AT THE FIGURES, WAITING FOR THEM TO COME NEARER.
IT'S MY GURU! SURELY THERE'S SOME MISCHIEF AFOOT!


THE KING! HE'S SEEN US!

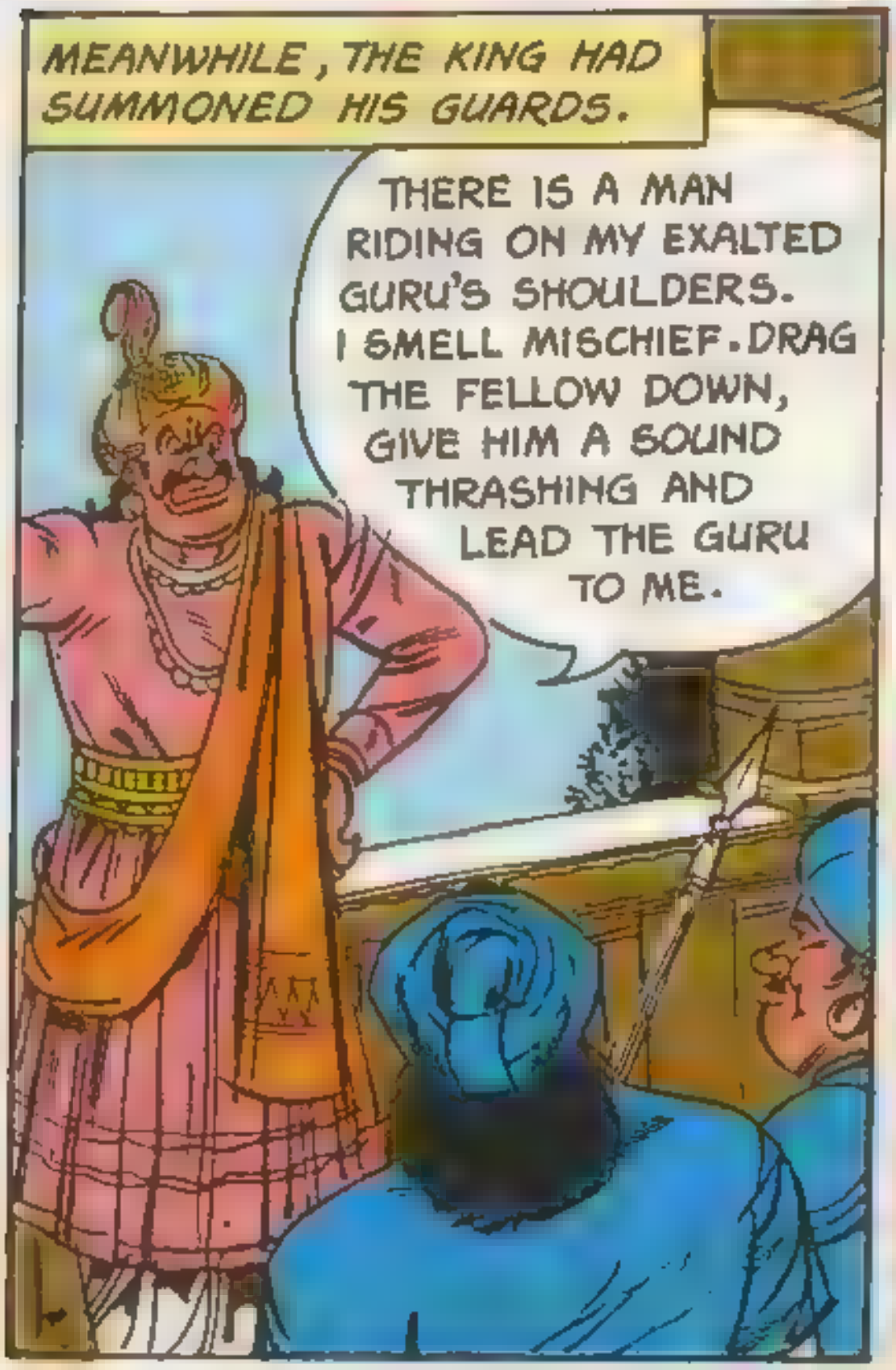

HE'S BOUND TO SEND HIS GUARDS OUT. I MUST BE QUICK!


HE SLID DOWN THE RAJGURU'S BACK AND...

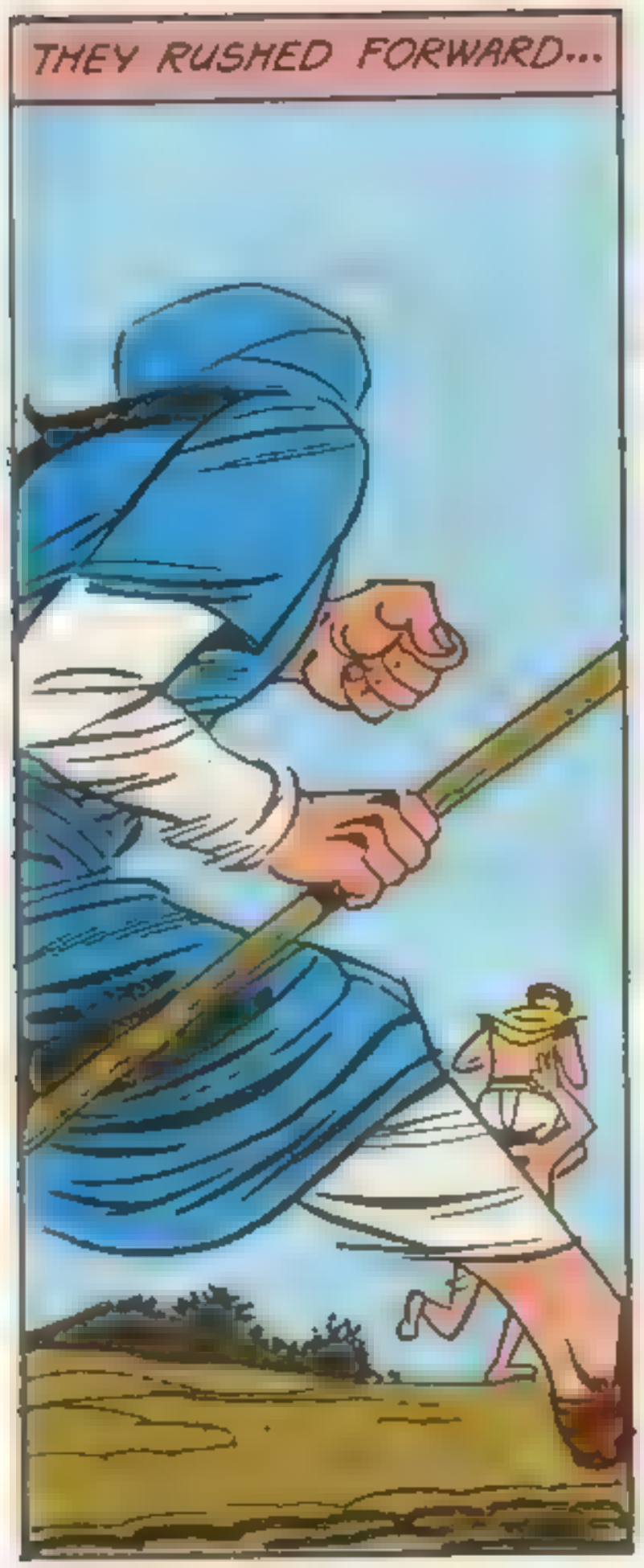

...FELL AT HIS FEET.
RESPECTED SIR, I HAVE TRIED YOU ENOUGH. YOU ARE TRULY A HOLY ONE. I SHALL SERVE YOU HUMBLY FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE. LET ME BEGIN BY CARRYING YOU HOME.

BEFORE THE RAJGURU COULD PROTEST, RAMAN HOISTED HIM ON HIS SHOULDERS...

...AND BEGAN WALKING.


MEANWHILE, THE KING HAD SUMMONED HIS GUARDS.
THERE IS A MAN RIDING ON MY EXALTED GURU'S SHOULDERS. I SMELL MISCHIEF. DRAG THE FELLOW DOWN, GIVE HIM A SOUND THRASHING AND LEAD THE GURU TO ME.

THE GUARDS HAD BEEN APPOINTED ONLY THE PREVIOUS EVENING AND THIS WAS THEIR FIRST ASSIGNMENT. THEY WERE EAGER TO MAKE IT A THOROUGH SUCCESS.
THERE THEY ARE!


THEY RUSHED FORWARD...

...DRAGGED THE RAJGURU OFF RAMAN'S BACK...
?

...GAVE HIM A SOUND THRASHING...

...AND ADDRESSED RAMAN IN THE MOST RESPECTFUL TERMS.
O HOLY ONE, THE SCOUNDREL HAS BEEN DEALT WITH. HIS MAJESTY HAS REQUESTED YOU TO PERMIT US TO ESCORT YOU TO HIM.

SOON RAMAN STOOD BEFORE THE KING —

IT'S HAPPENED. I AM IN THE COURT OF THE GREAT KING — AND I MEAN TO STAY HERE FOREVER.

THE KING WAS SURPRISED.

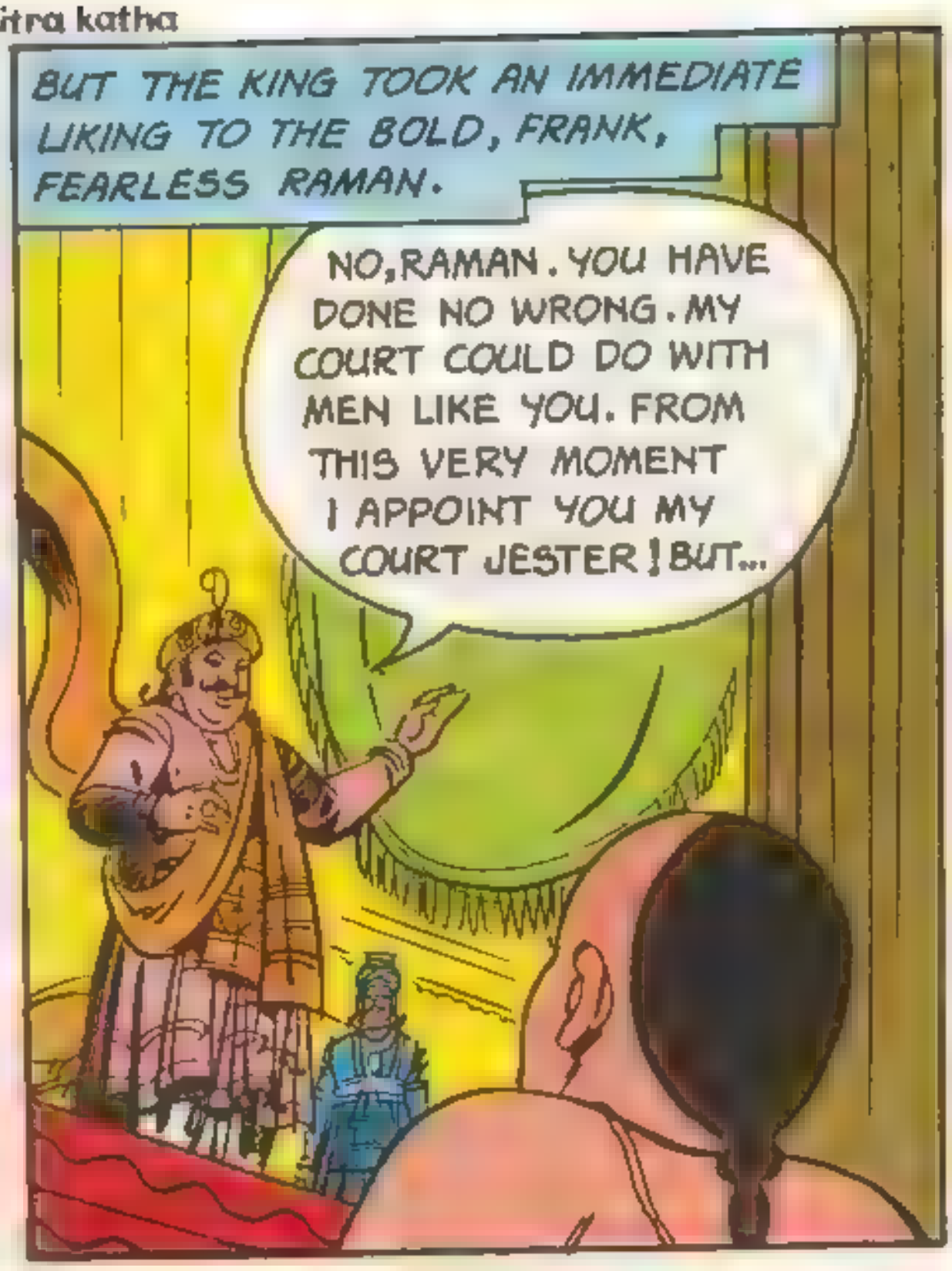
YOU ARE NOT MY GURU. WHO ARE YOU?

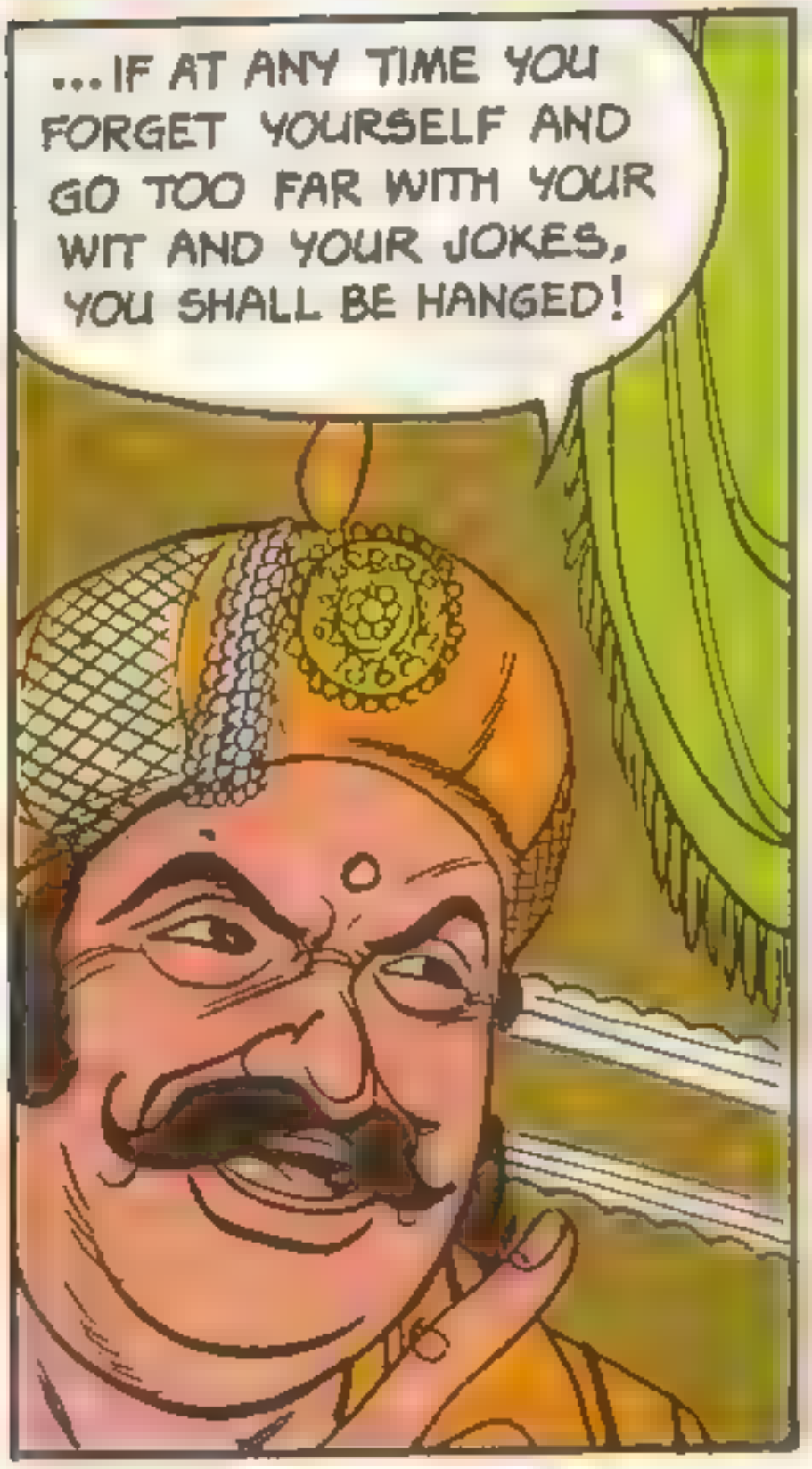
I AM RAMAN OF TENALI, YOUR MAJESTY.

BUT ... HOW ... WHERE IS THE GURU?

PARDON ME, YOUR MAJESTY. BUT THE GURU HAS MET WITH THE FATE HE DESERVED.

AND RAMAN TOLD THE KING ALL ABOUT HIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE GURU. THEN —
IF YOUR MAJESTY DEEMS IT FIT TO PUNISH ME, I'LL TAKE THE PUNISHMENT.


BUT THE KING TOOK AN IMMEDIATE LIKING TO THE BOLD, FRANK, FEARLESS RAMAN.
NO, RAMAN. YOU HAVE DONE NO WRONG. MY COURT COULD DO WITH MEN LIKE YOU. FROM THIS VERY MOMENT I APPOINT YOU MY COURT JESTER! BUT...


...IF AT ANY TIME YOU FORGET YOURSELF AND GO TOO FAR WITH YOUR WIT AND YOUR JOKES, YOU SHALL BE HANGED!

THE KING THEN DIPPED INTO HIS CUMMERBUND AND FISHED OUT A BAG OF GOLD COINS.
TAKE THIS. BUY YOURSELF A HOUSE IN VIJAYANAGARA AND SET UP A HOME.
I AM HONOURED, YOUR MAJESTY.

RAMAN COULD HARDLY BELIEVE HIS LUCK.
MY AGED MOTHER AND MY GOOD WIFE WILL BE HAPPY WATCHING ME PROSPER UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE GREAT KING. A GREAT DAY INDEED!
THUS DID RAMAN OF TENALI ENTER THE COURT OF THE GREAT KING OF VIJAYANAGARA.

ANXIOUS TO PLEASE THE KING, RAMAN LEFT HOME EARLY EACH MORNING AND RETURNED LATE AT NIGHT. AS HE WAS RETURNING HOME ONE MOONLIT NIGHT—
I HAVE NOT YET FOUND TIME TO WATER MY FIELDS THIS WEEK. TOMORROW I MUST...

SUDDENLY HE STIFFENED. TWO DARK FIGURES, LURKING IN THE SHADOWS, HAD CAUGHT HIS ATTENTION.
THIEVES! THEY DON'T KNOW I'VE SEEN THEM. WELL! WELL! WELL!

HE WALKED STRAIGHT ON TO HIS HOUSE. AS HE ENTERED —

AH! IS THAT YOU? YOUR DINNER IS COLD. I'LL WARM IT UP FOR YOU.

TO HER SURPRISE, RAMAN RAISED HIS VOICE AND ALMOST SHOUTED AT HER.

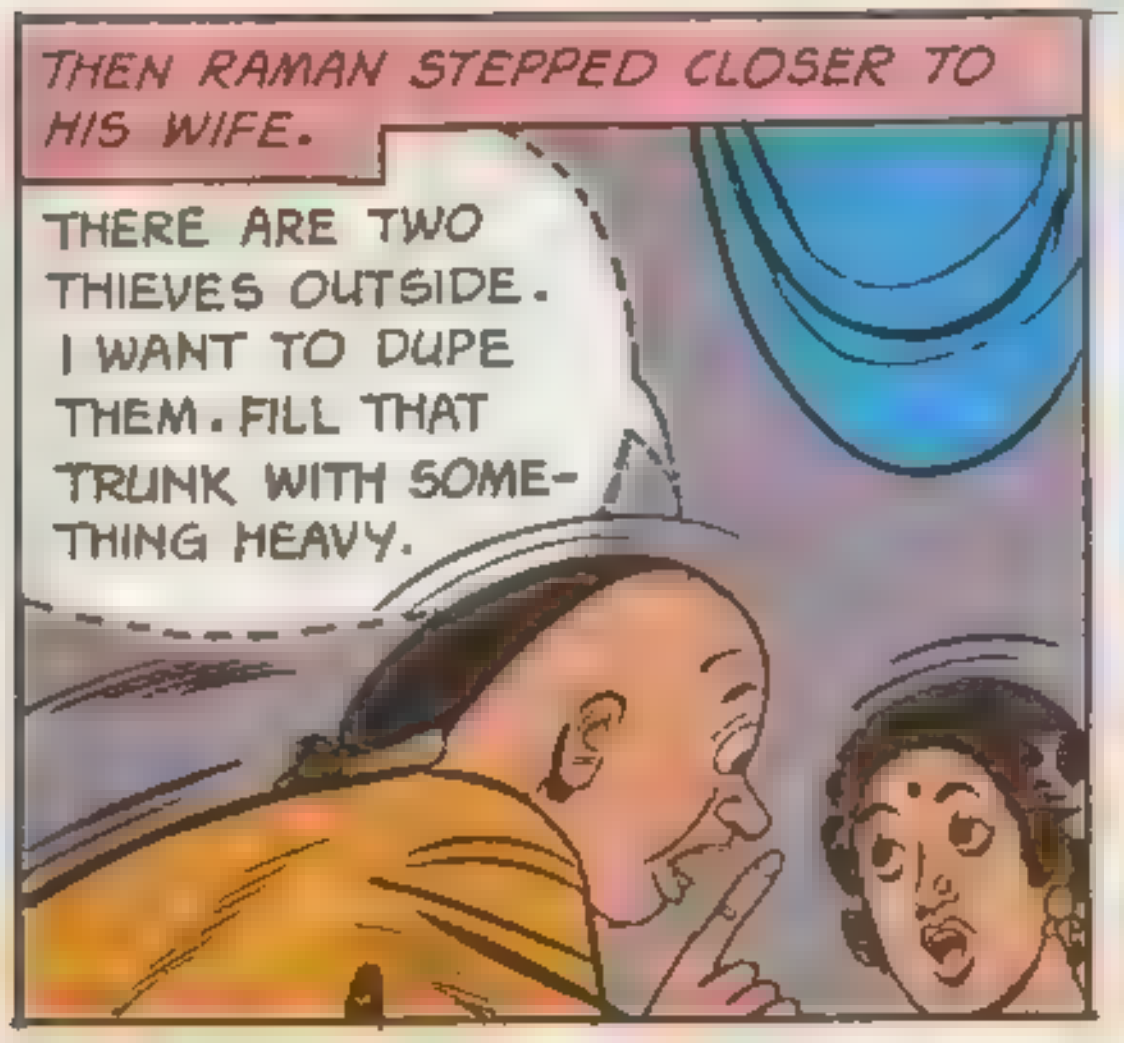
WE HAD A BUSY DAY AT COURT. THE CITY IS RIDDEN WITH THIEVES AND PEOPLE HAVE BEEN WARNED TO LOCK UP THEIR VALUABLES.

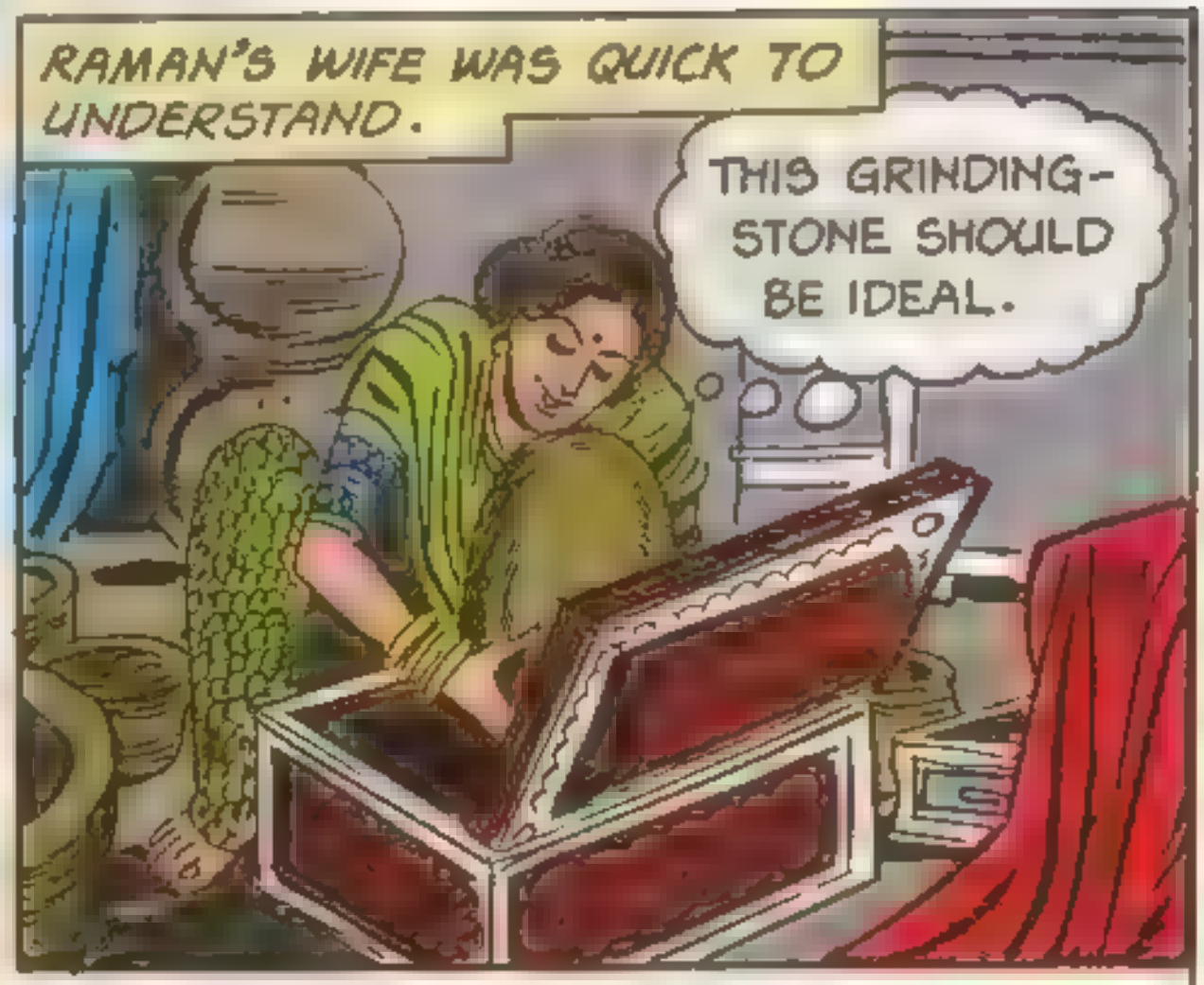
OH DEAR! WHAT SHALL WE DO?

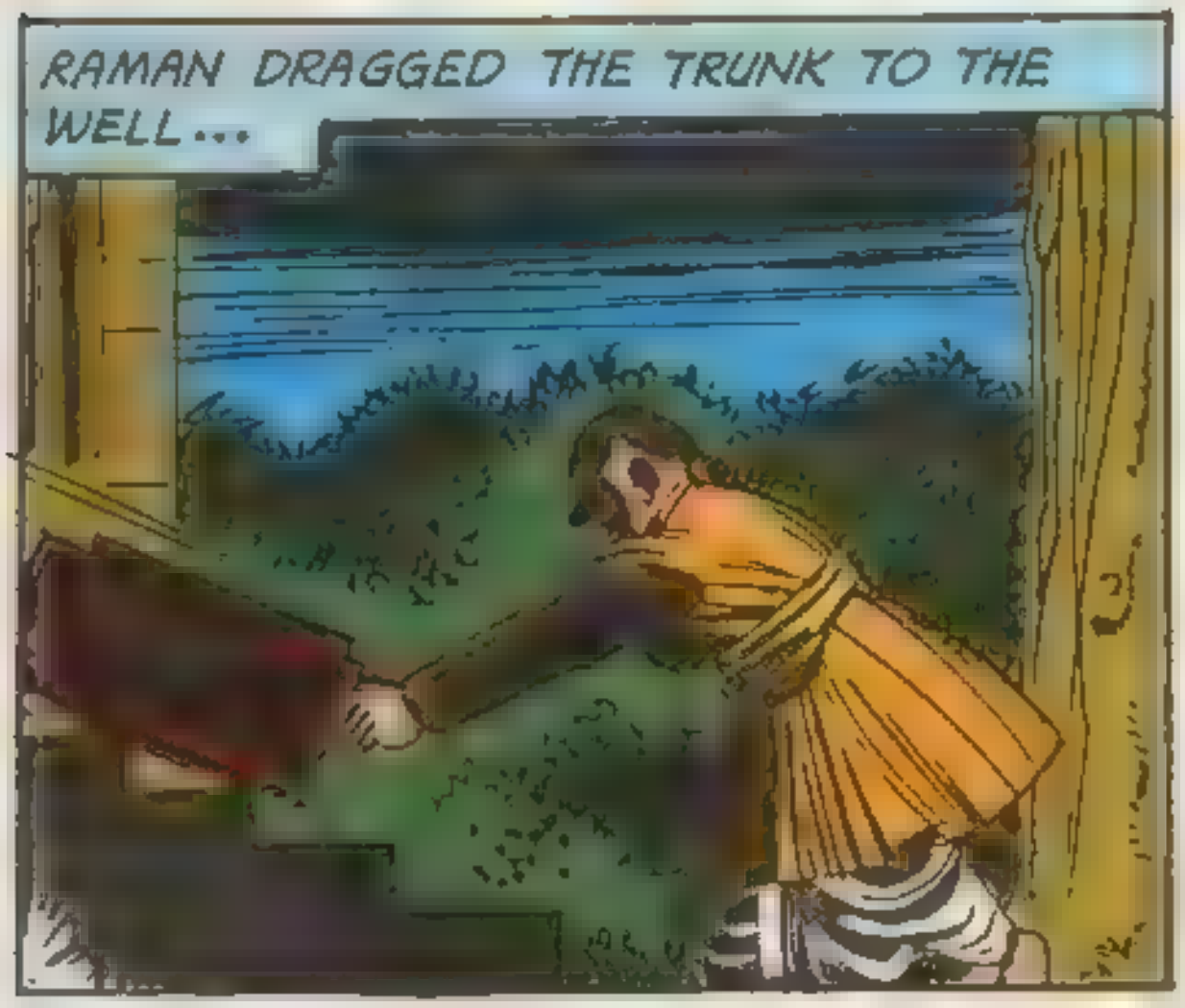
I DON'T EVEN LATCH THE DOOR TILL WE SLEEP.

PUT ALL OUR JEWELLERY, SILVERWARE AND MONEY INTO A TRUNK AND I'LL THROW IT INTO THE WELL. NO THIEF WILL EVER FIND IT.

HA! HA! THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK.


THEN RAMAN STEPPED CLOSER TO HIS WIFE.
THERE ARE TWO THIEVES OUTSIDE. I WANT TO DUPE THEM. FILL THAT TRUNK WITH SOMETHING HEAVY.

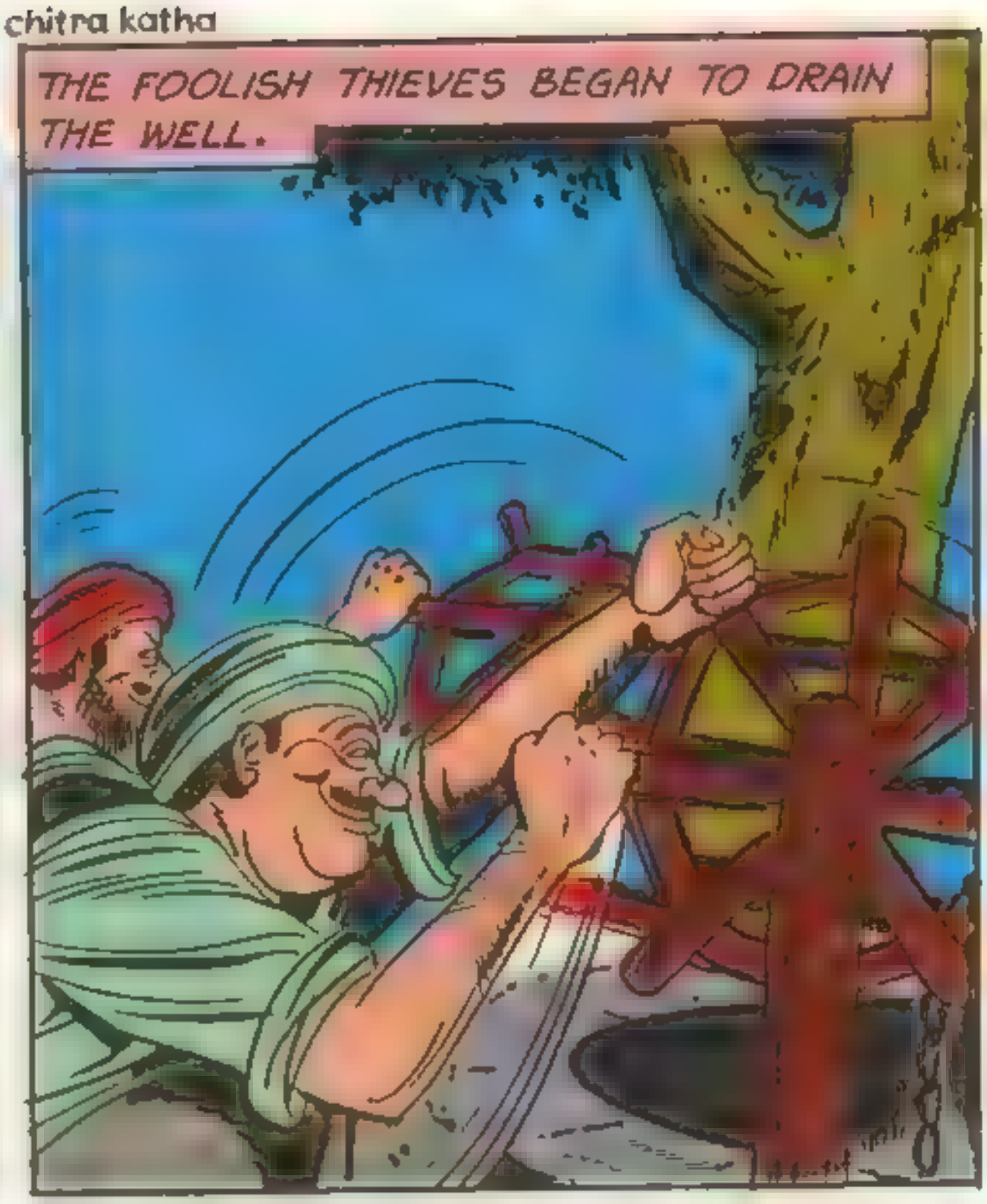

RAMAN'S WIFE WAS QUICK TO UNDERSTAND.
THIS GRINDING-STONE SHOULD BE IDEAL.

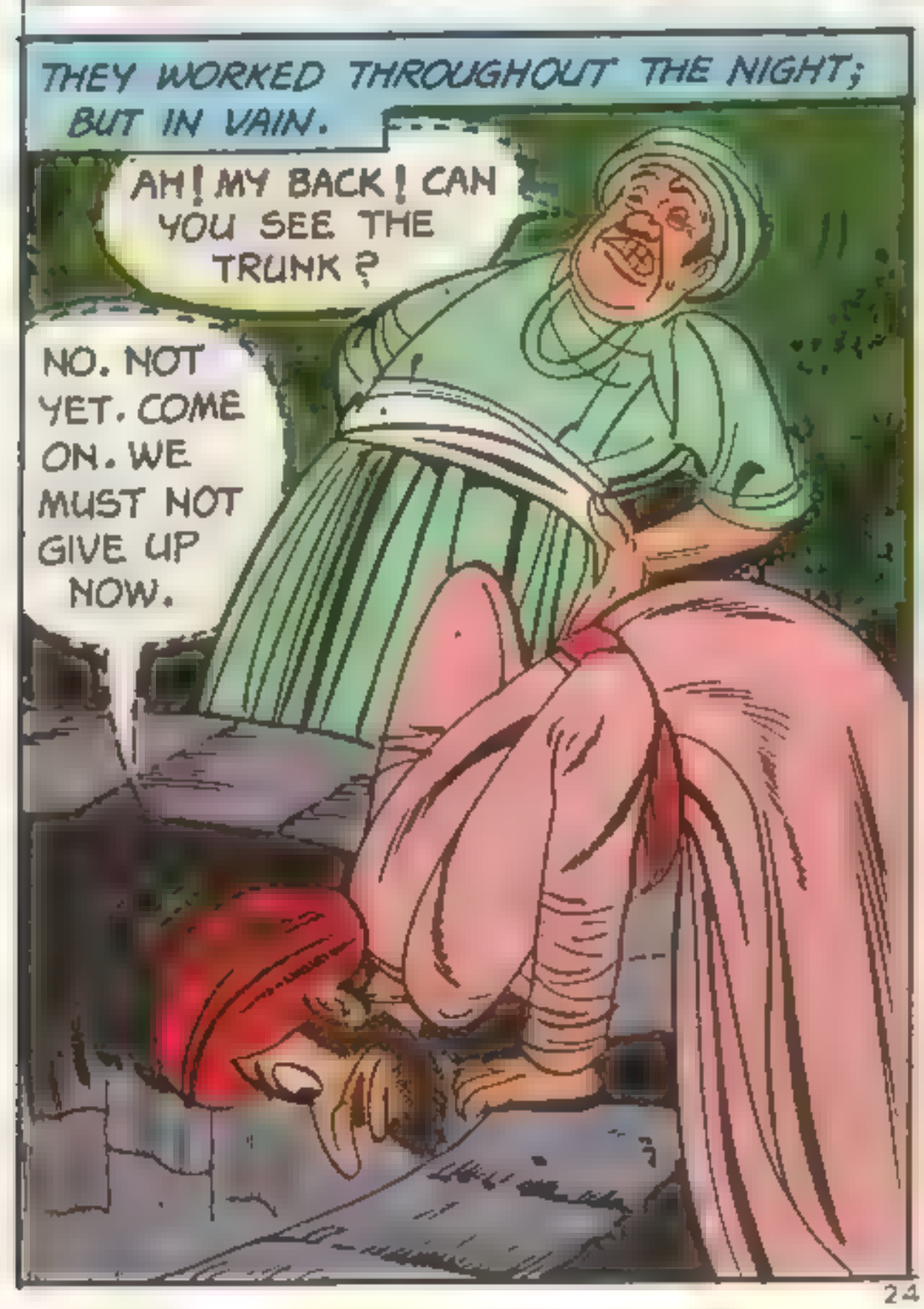

RAMAN DRAGGED THE TRUNK TO THE WELL...

...AND THREW IT IN, MAKING AS LOUD A SPLASH AS HE COULD.
NOW FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.

A LITTLE LATER, WHEN THE LAMPS WERE BLOWN OUT IN THE HOUSE —
THEY'VE GONE TO BED. IT'S SAFE TO COME OUT. LET'S GET TO WORK.

THEY WENT UP TO THE WELL AND PEEPED IN.
THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE MUCH WATER IN THERE.
GOOD! THAT SHOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR US.


THE FOOLISH THIEVES BEGAN TO DRAIN THE WELL.

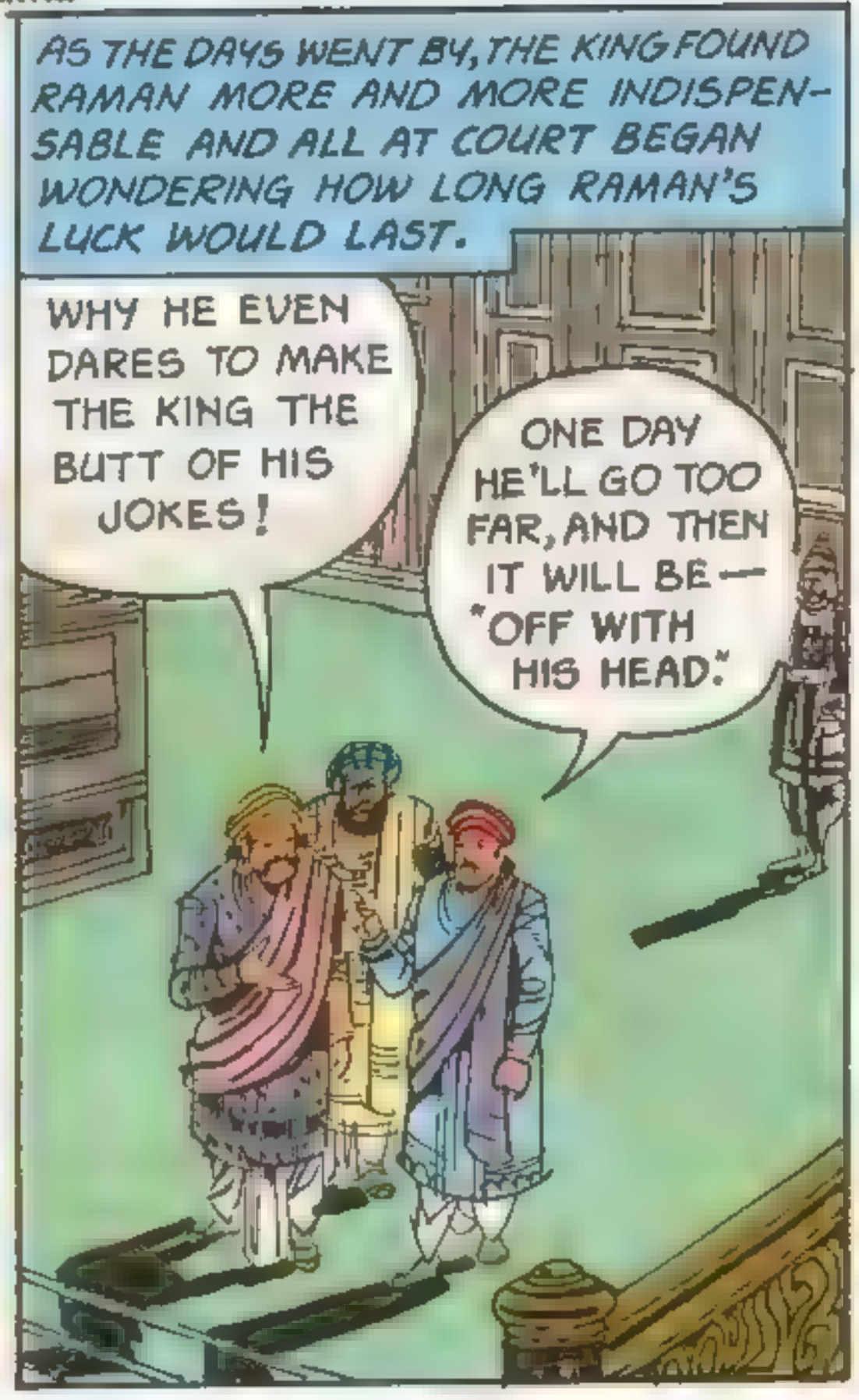

THEY WORKED THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT; BUT IN VAIN.
AH! MY BACK! CAN YOU SEE THE TRUNK?
NO. NOT YET. COME ON. WE MUST NOT GIVE UP NOW.

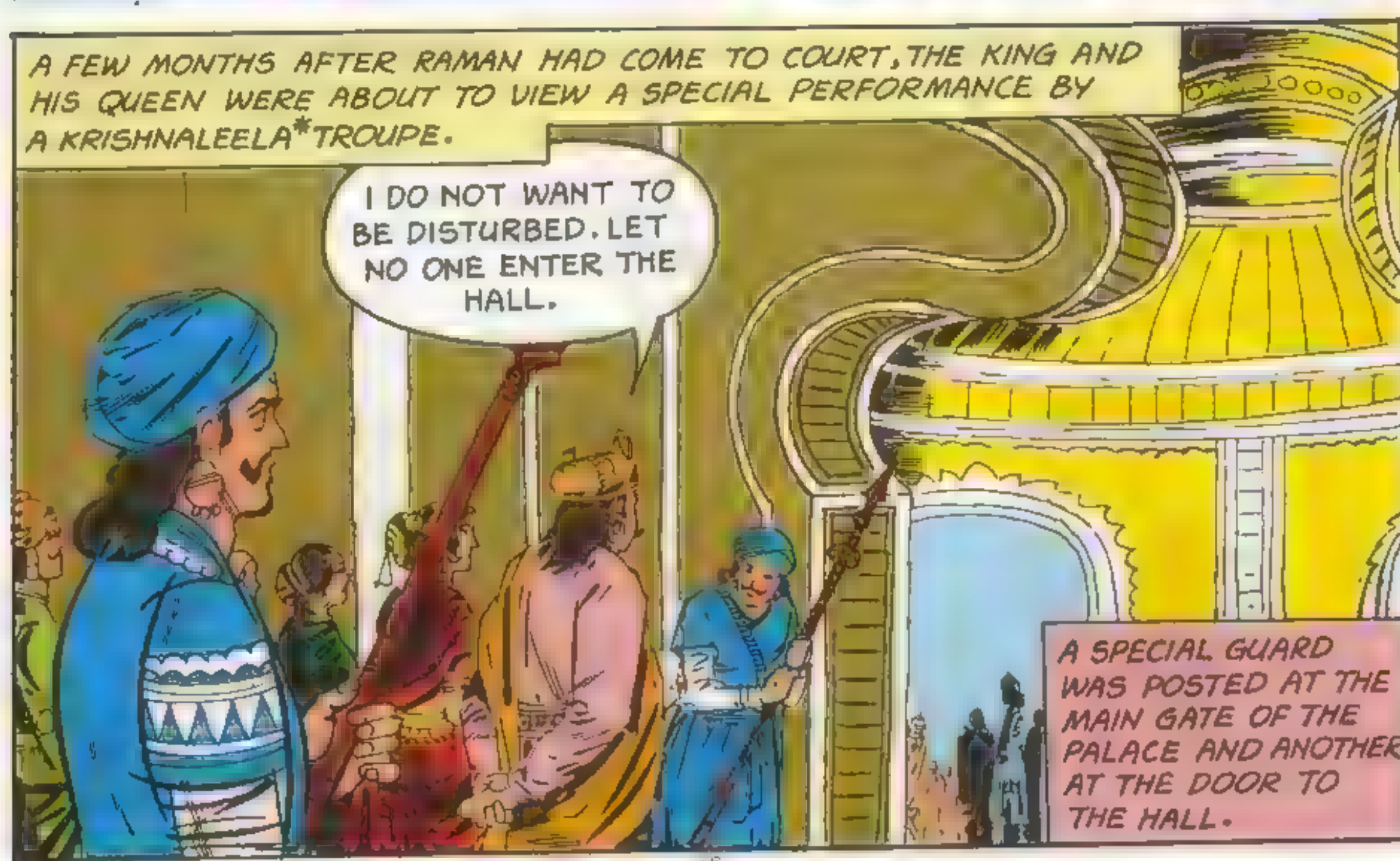
A LITTLE BEFORE DAWN, RAMAN SAW THAT HIS FIELDS HAD HAD ALL THE WATER THEY NEEDED.
IT'S TIME I RELIEVED THE POOR FOOLS.

HE WENT TO THE WELL.
THANK YOU, MY GOOD MEN. YOU HAVE DONE A FINE JOB!

THE STARTLED THIEVES DROPPED THE ROPES...
?!

...AND RAN FOR THEIR LIVES.
HA! HA! HA! WATCH THEM RUN!





* PLAYS BASED ON KRISHNA'S LIFE

MEANWHILE RAMAN CAME TO THE PALACE AND WAS ABOUT TO WALK IN AS USUAL, WHEN—
YOU MAY NOT ENTER. THE KING'S ORDERS. HE IS NOT TO BE DISTURBED.

RAMAN'S CURIOSITY WAS AROUSED.
THERE IS SOMETHING SPECIAL GOING ON AND I HAVE NOT BEEN INVITED. I MUST SEE WHAT IT IS!

HE TURNED TO THE GUARDS.
BUT I MUST SEE THE KING. HE HAS PROMISED ME A REWARD AND HAS ASKED ME TO SEE HIM.
THE REWARD MUST BE A BAG OF GOLD AS USUAL.

HE LOOKED GREEDILY AT RAMAN.
ALL RIGHT! WHAT WILL YOU GIVE ME IF I LET YOU ENTER?
HALF OF WHAT THE KING GIVES ME.

THAT WAS EXACTLY WHAT THE GUARD WANTED TO HEAR.

YOU MAY GO IN, THEN. BUT REMEMBER— HALF OF WHAT YOU GET IS FOR ME.

I'D BETTER RUN IN BEFORE HE CHANGES HIS MIND!

WHEN HE REACHED THE DOOR TO THE AUDIENCE HALL —

STOP! YOU MAY NOT ENTER.

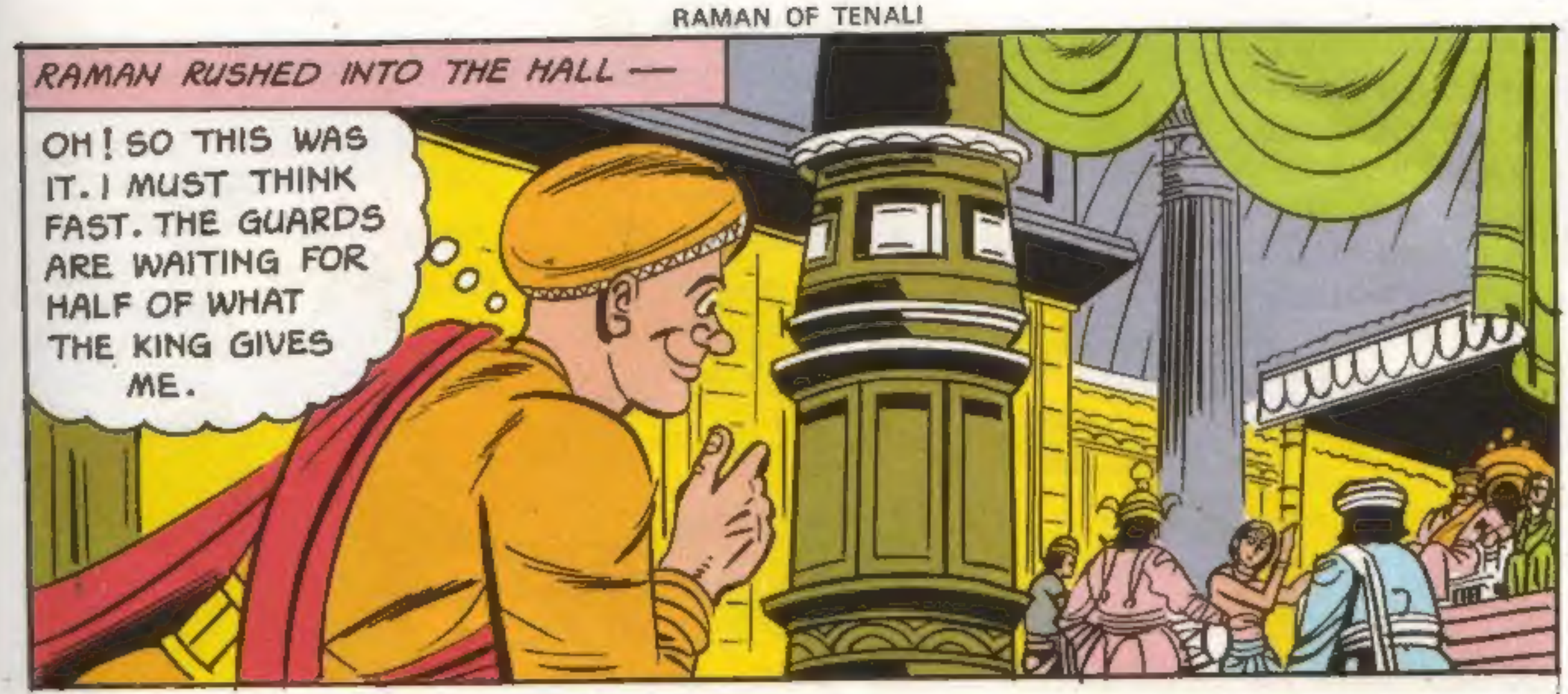
PLEASE DON'T STOP ME. THE KING HAS SENT FOR ME TO COLLECT A REWARD.

A REWARD?

LET ME ENTER AND I'LL GIVE YOU HALF OF WHAT THE KING GIVES ME.

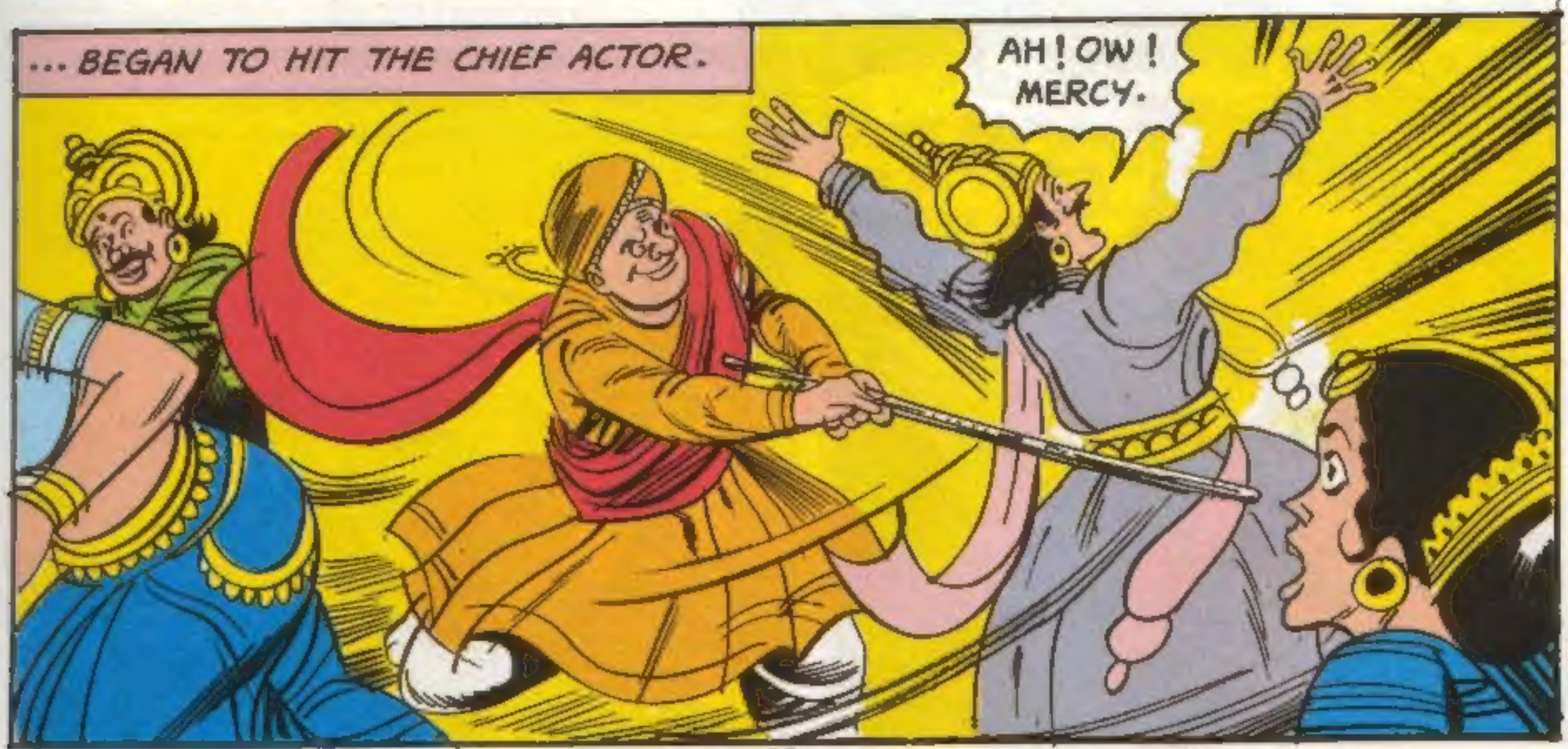
ALL RIGHT. BUT DON'T FORGET... HALF OF WHAT THE KING GIVES YOU...

... IS YOURS!


RAMAN RUSHED INTO THE HALL —
OH! SO THIS WAS IT. I MUST THINK FAST. THE GUARDS ARE WAITING FOR HALF OF WHAT THE KING GIVES ME.

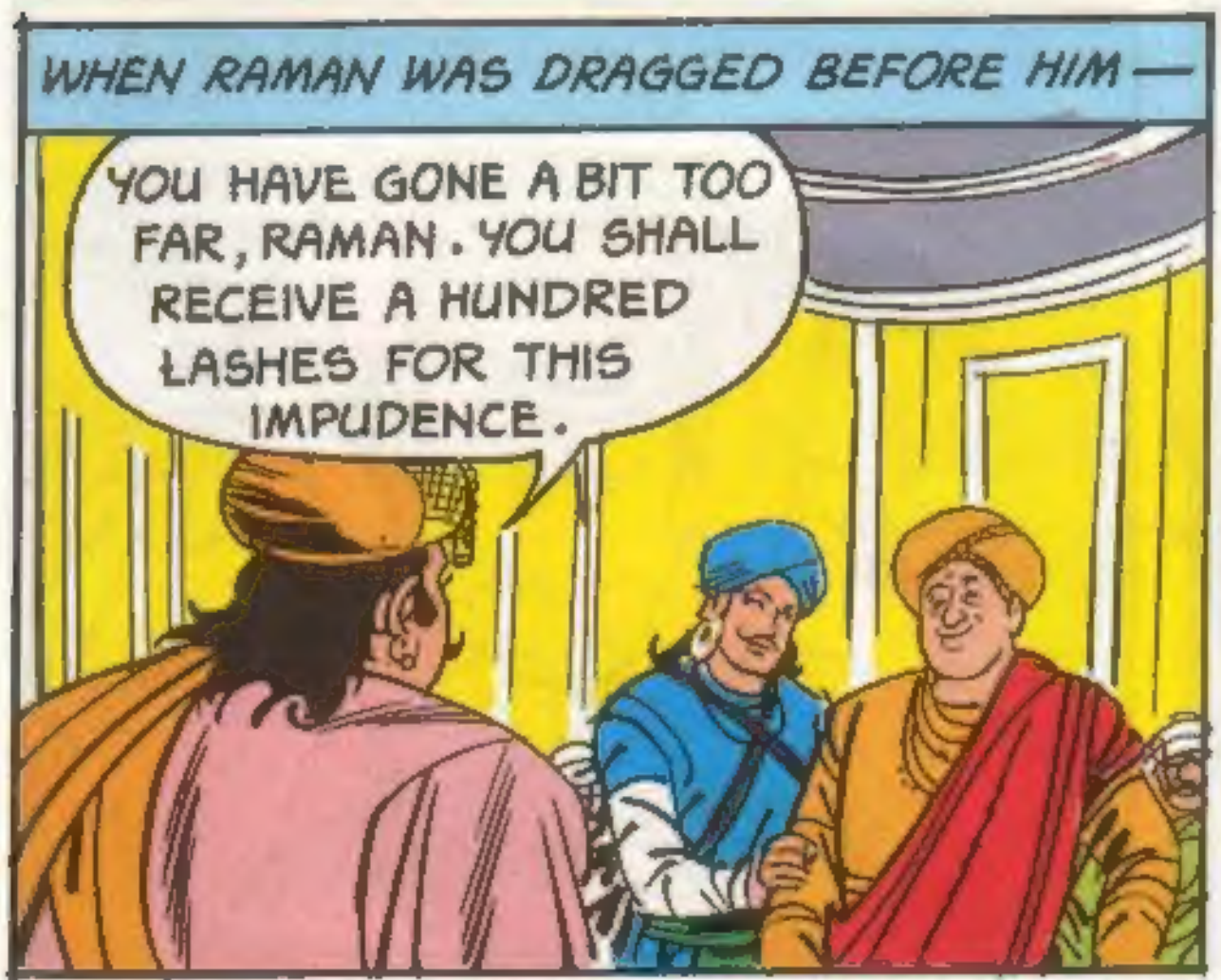
HE RAN UP TO THE PLAYERS...

...AND PICKING UP A STICK...

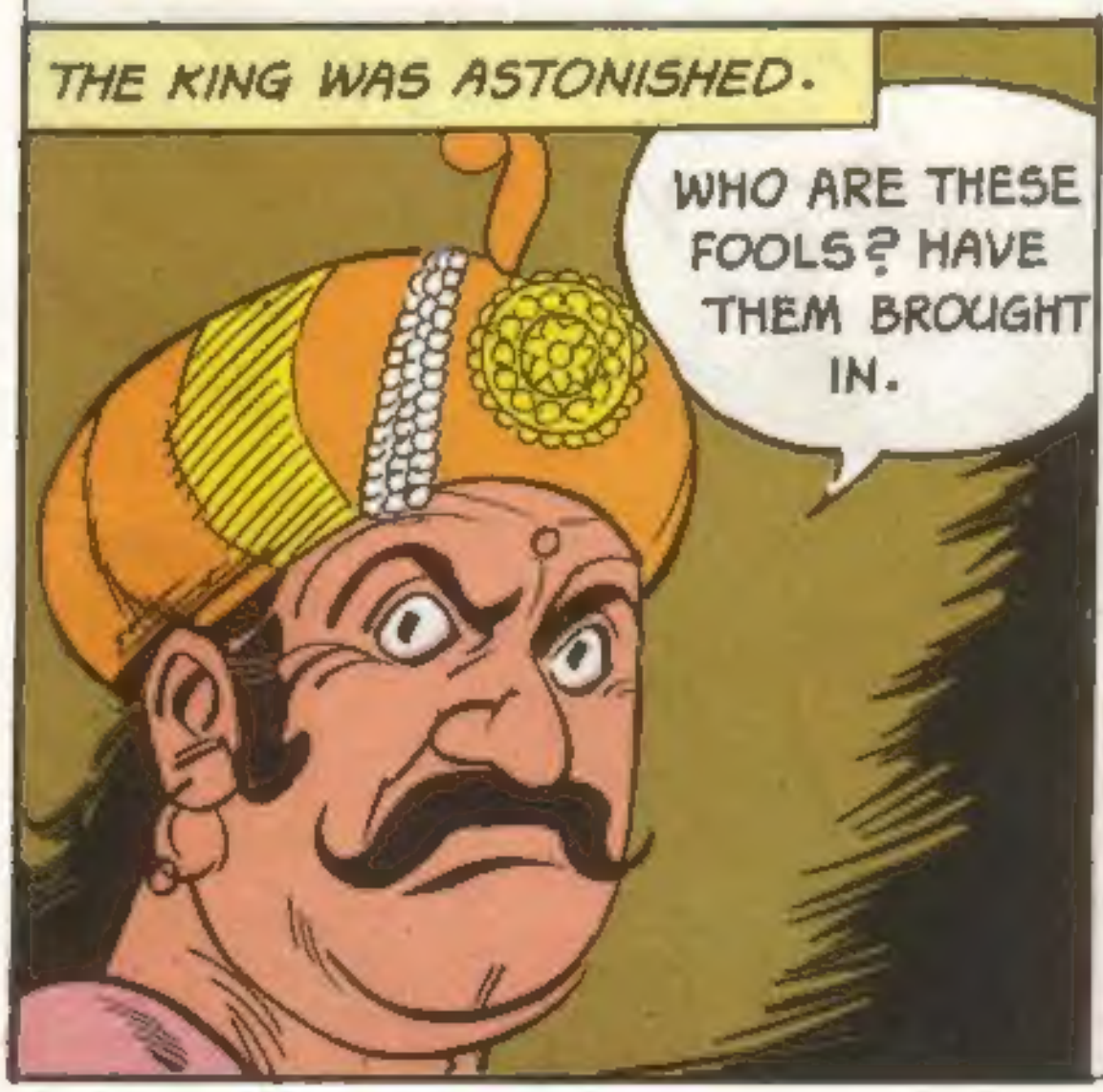

...BEGAN TO HIT THE CHIEF ACTOR.
AH! OW! MERCY.

RAMAN! STOP IT! HAVE YOU GONE MAD? HOW DARE YOU DISTURB THE PERFORMANCE.

HE TURNED TO HIS ATTENDANTS.
BRING THAT FOOL BEFORE ME.


WHEN RAMAN WAS DRAGGED BEFORE HIM —
YOU HAVE GONE A BIT TOO FAR, RAMAN. YOU SHALL RECEIVE A HUNDRED LASHES FOR THIS IMPUDENCE.

AS AN ATTENDANT RAISED THE WHIP —
PLEASE WAIT, YOUR MAJESTY. I HAVE TWO FRIENDS OUTSIDE WHO WANT TO SHARE THE LASHES.


THE KING WAS ASTONISHED.
WHO ARE THESE FOOLS? HAVE THEM BROUGHT IN.

RAMAN WHISPERED SOMETHING INTO THE ATTENDANT'S EAR.

THE ATTENDANT RETURNED WITH THE TWO GUARDS.
MY GUARDS? WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS, RAMAN? DO YOU WANT TO BE BEHEADED?

I AM HONOUR BOUND TO SHARE WITH THEM WHAT YOU WISH TO GIVE ME.
AND HE TOLD THE KING HOW HE HAD GAINED ENTRY INTO THE PALACE AND THE AUDIENCE HALL.

THE KING WAS AT ONCE ANGRY AND AMUSED. ANGRY WITH THE DISHONEST GUARDS AND AMUSED BY RAMAN'S WIT.
HOW DARE YOU ALLOW YOURSELVES TO BE BRIBED INTO DISOBEYING MY ORDERS!

HE TURNED TO THE ATTENDANTS.
GIVE THEM FIFTY LASHES EACH AND DISMISS THEM.

THEN HE TURNED TO RAMAN.
I AM GRATEFUL TO YOU, RAMAN, FOR EXPOSING THESE ROGUES. YOU SHALL RECEIVE A BAG OF GOLD FOR YOUR EFFORTS.
THUS DID RAMAN EARN AS USUAL, NOT ONLY THE KING'S FORGIVENESS BUT ALSO A REWARD.